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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

"THE CIRCUMSCRIPTION OF TIME": ASPECTS OF TEMPORALITY IN MILTON'S *SAMSON AGONISTES*

BY

DAVID BRIAN GAY

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Circumscription of Time": Aspects of Temporality in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, submitted by David Brian Gay in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Patricia Demers
Robert James Merrett
John King-Farlow

Date: April 19, 1989

For Anne

She openeth her mouth with wisdom;
and in her tongue is the law of kindness.
Proverbs 31: 26

ABSTRACT

Temporality, as Paul Ricoeur defines it, is concerned with the way in which the human experience of time finds expression in the organization of narrative. The texts Ricoeur chooses to demonstrate the extremes of temporality are the Confessions of Augustine, which probes the paradoxical and discordant nature of lived experience, and the Poetics of Aristotle, which asserts the power of the poet to bind experience into order and concordance. Ricoeur's model could be applied to Milton's Samson Agonistes, for, in this dramatic poem, Milton explores some of the elements of Christian temporality articulated by Augustine using the form described by Aristotle.

The dialectic of discordance and concordance implied in Ricoeur's comparison is manifest in the biblical texts Milton draws upon in Samson Agonistes. The Book of Judges, which is the source of the Samson story, describes the vicissitudes of covenantal history. The Psalms, which are frequently alluded to in the poem, become an important dimension of the role of memory in the drama. And important passages in Old Testament prophecy, specifically those which express the concept of the "Day of the Lord," develop the sense of providential presence and action in the poem.

A persistent critical issue, initiated by Samuel Johnson, concerns the apparent failure of the poem to fulfill the standards of the Poetics since its middle episodes do not seem to precipitate the reversal of the drama and its catastrophe. While critics have generally proposed that Milton's theology of regeneration satisfies this structural criterion, Milton's departure from Aristotelian standards may be a significant indication of his interpretation of Christian temporality. The absence of a causal relationship between the episodes and the reversal serves to emphasize the freedom of providential action and the nature the patience which anticipates it.

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INTRODUCTION

In Book VII of Paradise Lost, in Raphael's narrative of the creation of the universe, the Son, acting as God's agent of creation, imposes limits on the world:

> He took the golden Compasses, prepar'd
> In God's Eternal store, to circumscribe
> This Universe, and all created things:
> One foot he centred, and the other turn'd
> Round through the vast profundity obscure,
> And said, Thus far extend, thus far thy bounds,
> This be thy just Circumference, O World. [1]

This act of circumscription sets limits to space, yet the act itself is expressed in the temporal continuum of narrative. Raphael is conscious of this:

> Immediate are the Acts of God, more swift
> Than time or motion, but to human ears
> Cannot without process of speech be told,
> So told as earthly notion can receive. (VII:176-179)

The act of creation exists in the *totum simul* of God's present and as the *in principium* of unfallen, human time. What Adam and Eve must grasp from this and apply to their own situations is that limit or circumference is essential to the development and preservation of identity and not, as Satan later argues, to its repression.

In the preface to Samson Agonistes, in announcing his intention to adhere to the classical ideal of unity of time, Milton states: "The circumscription of time, wherein the whole Drama begins and ends, is according to ancient rule, and best example, within the space of 24 hours" (Hughes 550). Here it is time and not space which is limited, and since the delimited time is the fallen time of a fallen creature, the action the poem imitates witnesses the division between God's eternity and the human present as well as their potential for reintegration. As Sophocles does with Oedipus, Milton is able to summon, distill and unfold, in portraying the last few hours of Samson's life, all of the forces which have shaped Samson's life and comprised his present. Nevertheless, the vacancy and sterility of fallen time -- time as habituation to servitude and confinement -- is limited by the intervention of providence which merges with the action of the drama and precipitates its reversal. While Samson recollects the events of his life and its various episodes and struggles with the relationships between them, the action of providence, an action which effectively recollects Samson and reintegrates his present with the pattern of providential history, provides the full scope of the action in this poem. The nature of this action, how Milton portrays it using the conventions of tragedy, and how his portrayal implies a conception of providential time which comprehends the ruptures and dissonances of fallen experience, is the subject of this dissertation.

---

[1] John Milton, Paradise Lost, VII: 225-231, John Milton: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1984). All references to Milton's poems are to this edition.

Milton's distinctive conception of providential time should first be placed among the time concepts of other writers in his own century. The central paradigms have been studied in works by Herbert Weisinger, Herschel Baker, C.A. Patrides (The Grand Design of God) and Achsah Guibbory. Perhaps the most essential paradigms are cyclical time and linear time. Each of these can be viewed in either a positive or a negative aspect. The cycle can signify the futility of endless repetition through new replications of old mistakes, and so provide a sense of the tragic in history. Or, more positively, it can emblematize eternity as having neither a beginning nor an end, and convey the assurance of order, regularity and stability in the cosmos. The line may slope downwards into states of decay which take us ever further from original perfection. Conversely, it may tend upwards, encouraging a notion of real progress in earthly existence and the promise of a Golden Age. Guibbory, who compares these paradigms to a "map" of time, suggests representatives of each approach. Donne, as illustrated in the "First Anniversary" and elsewhere, views time as a linear process of physical and moral decay (Guibbory 69-96). For Herrick, meanwhile, the cycle is a positive pattern because the orderly rhythms of nature reflect the ordained seasons of human life, and the poet celebrates both (Guibbory 138-167).

Guibbory establishes a comparison between Milton's use of these temporal paradigms and, among Milton's near-contemporaries, that of Francis Bacon: "Milton's study of the past leads him to the conclusion that people must break with the past rather than repeat the pattern of former ages. From the early prose to the late poems he consistently contrasts the cycles of the past with the path of progress that people can forge in the future" (169). It is worthwhile to compare Bacon with Milton insofar as both subsume the cyclic recurrence of error in a larger pattern of progress. Milton believed that vestiges of virtue survive in the material world after the Fall, and argues. in Of Education, that learning might even "repair the ruins" of the Fall. But comparison with Bacon must be carefully qualified; it does not imply that Milton maintained a uniform conception of material or political improvement throughout his career. Milton certainly expected progress in the political sphere early in his career. In Areopagitica, he envisions a "noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks" (Hughes 745). The failure of the English nation to accept what seemed to Milton to be a providentially ordained opportunity led him, in the writing of his major poems, to explore the origins of our failings in our "first disobedience," that is, our first loss or refusal of freedom. Samson Agonistes continues this exploration.

The freedom which is lost at the beginning of history is restored at history's end. Just as the creation of the human person is the culmination of the six day's work in Genesis, so too is the recreation of humanity the culmination of a span of history which Augustine, in a formula which Milton follows in Paradise Lost, divides into six epochs beyond which lies an eternal Sabbath (City of God XXII: 30). The cultivation of the paradise within in Paradise Lost, the renunciation of conventional methods of political change in Paradise Regained and the conjoining of the revival of a human spirit with the destruction of the symbol of an earthly kingdom in Samson Agonistes all disassociate Milton's conception of the *telos* of history from the notion of earthly material progress. Marshall Grossman places the idea of progress in Milton's poetry in this perspective: "What is at issue is not the expectation that things will necessarily get better over time, but that they grow into their proper or complete forms. The nature of a thing, an event, or a person is thus displaced from its origin to its end" (14). Or as Arthur Barker suggests, bringing out the typological basis of temporal process, "Milton never lost his conviction that the fulfilment of the particular is the end of the experiential process . . . . In his way and time, Samson is the type of what the Christian may be the type of in his way and time, fulfilling the letter of the type by bringing into appropriate action the gifts of the Spirit" ("Milton's Later Poems" 179). Milton's conception of progress is based upon typology, which can be thought of as the distribution in time of God's eternal will, with each type prefiguring, in addition to Christ who is the fulfilment of all types, the restoration of the divine image in humanity as the end or *telos* of history. At the same time, as we will discover, Milton's poetic renditions of the end signify and recover the power and potential of human origins. This view of progress is influenced by Saint Augustine, who wrote the City of God, the treatise on providential history which so influenced Milton in Paradise Lost, during the collapse of his own civilization.

In spite of differences in the scope of action afforded by their genres, Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes share and express similar attitudes towards time. Each poem identifies and isolates a tragic pattern which constitutes fallen time, either as history or as individual experience or both, in order to dramatize a clear break with the pattern. Our idea of time is said to be based on our perception of succession. In the actions Milton's poems explore it lies in the experience of change:

> If thou beest hee; But O how fall'n! how chang'd
> From him, who in the happy Realms of Light
> Cloth'd with transcendent brightness didst outshine
> Myriads though bright. (Paradise Lost, I: 84-87)
>
> I now must change
> Those Notes to Tragic; foul distrust, and breach
> Disloyal on the part of Man. (Paradise Lost, IX: 5-6)
>
> O change beyond report, thought, or belief! (Samson Agonistes, 117)

As these quotations indicate, change, which registers the dissonance between past and present, expectation and reality, is the common feature of time as lived experience and time in narratives which record the experience of change. This study seeks to understand how Milton's conception of providential time, a providence which, as Milton portrays it, effects its own, often traumatic changes in a tragic human condition, comprehends and accounts for the ruptures and dissonances of temporal change. Rather than gauging the expression of time in Samson Agonistes against the basic paradigms of circular and linear time, my purpose requires an examination of the various metaphoric categories of temporal experience in the poem, to read these categories as they are valued by the subject in his sense of alienation from providence, and to consider how they are revalued by the portrayed movement of providence in the poem. These alternative or dichotomous readings become aspects of the dialectic of time and eternity, despair and hope in the poem.

The introspective, self-searching and confessional quality of Augustine's Confessions is a source of comparison for similar qualities in Milton's Samson. Both Augustine and Milton would, of course, find the archetypal categories of temporal experience, of wayfaring and warfaring, prodigality and quest, darkness and light among others, in the Bible, and so it is not surprising that they share this common ground. A dialectical approach to these categories draws from studies of the Confessions by Ladislas Boros ("Les Categories de Temporalites chez Augustin") and especially Paul Ricoeur (Time and Narrative 1: Chapter 1). Ricoeur is a particularly valuable influence on this study in part because his chapters on Augustine's Confessions and Aristotle's Poetics are, in themselves, insightful examinations of these texts, and in part because Ricoeur's juxtaposition of Augustine and Aristotle, in the course of his monumental study of time and narrative, makes these texts far more accessible to my own critical project than they might otherwise be. Ricoeur's definition of "temporality" as the sense in which time becomes "human to the extent that it is organized after the manner of narrative" (Time and Narrative 1: 3) is an essential term in this study of Milton.[2] In applying Ricoeur's ideas to Milton's Samson Agonistes, it is important to add Milton's essentially theological distinction between "fallen" and "unfallen" time, a distinction Ricoeur by no means overlooks in his treatment of Augustine. Samson Agonistes certainly intensifies our experience and understanding of fallen time. The prologue and the middle episodes consist of verbal reconstructions of Samson's past. Samson agonizes over the "what ifs" in his life experience, and both the actual and the hypothetical tracks of his experience inevitably recombine in the real present of his isolation and confinement. As providence intervenes in fallen time, the prison of past and present open into a future which is both new and original. The convergence of fallen and providential time is realized and expressed in the structure and action of Samson Agonistes.

A clarification of the specific ideas in Ricoeur's work which are valuable to the study of Milton's tragic poem provides a prospectus for the study as a whole. In his article entitled "Narrative Time," which clearly lays some of the foundations for the longer study entitled Time and Narrative, Ricoeur suggests that the concepts of "temporality" and "narrativity" are related in terms of a structural reciprocity: "I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent. Their relationship is therefore reciprocal" (169).Ricoeur lays out this premise in the belief that it is generally overlooked by writers in various disciplines who work within an "uncriticized temporal framework" in which time "corresponds to the ordinary representation of time as a linear succession of instants" (170). In the first volume of Time and Narrative, Ricoeur works out this major presupposition in his study by juxtaposing the Confessions of St. Augustine as a theory of time to the Poetics of Aristotle as a theory of plot. This juxtaposition holds out exciting possibilities for the analysis of Samson Agonistes because it conveys the tensions which are generally held to inform the poem. The essential definition of temporality as the literary expression of the human experience of time serves to focus Samson's ordeal. And plot, by which Ricoeur means the "intelligible whole that governs a succession of events in any story" ("Narrative Time" 171), is the highest principle in Aristotle's analysis of tragic form. Plot, as Milton treats it in Samson Agonistes, is not simply the organization of a random and fragmented experience. It is the principle which mediates and clarifies Samson's lived experience, as both the past of memory, the present of action and the future of decision, in relation to providential history.

---

[2] Samson Agonistes is a dramatic and not a narrative poem, but Ricoeur's commentary on Aristotle emphasizes the concepts of imitation, plot and reversal and is therefore very accessible to this study of Samson Agonistes. Where Aristotle distinguishes drama from narrative, Ricoeur deliberately makes narrative the category which encompasses "drama , epic and history" (Time and Narrative 32) and thereby makes Aristotle's analysis of plot integral to the direction of his own study.

In offering Ricoeur's comparison of Augustine and Aristotle as means of approaching Milton's poem, I am not arguing for the extensive influence of the Confessions on Samson Agonistes, or indeed, for the general or pervasive influence of Augustine on Milton. The emphasis on the power of divine love in the Confessions is by no means apparent in Samson Agonistes, and perhaps even escapes a poem which confronts the difficult and perplexing issue of the Holy War tradition in the Old

Testament. And as for Aristotle, we sense that Milton's prefatory remarks on tragic drama evade the precepts of the Poetics and direct us to the precedents of practice rather than of theory. Nevertheless, the persistent issue of the nature and legitimacy of "Christian tragedy" can be approached with innovation following the example of Ricoeur's highly suggestive model. Augustine offers what is perhaps our greatest expression of Christian temporality; Aristotle offers perhaps our most important theoretical description of the genre of classical tragedy. The juxtaposition of these two figures both frames and stimulates a renewed contemplation of the durable and difficult proposition of Christian tragedy.

The Augustinian and Aristotelian models of temporality become the basis for an extensive and consistent analysis of the tensions and polarities the models propagate when brought to bear upon the poem. Ricoeur defines the essential juxtaposition as follows: "The Augustinian analysis gives a representation of time in which discordance never ceases to belie the desire for that concordance that forms the very essence of the *animus*.. The Aristotelian analysis, on the other hand, establishes the dominance of concordance over discordance in the configuration of the plot" (Time and Narrative 1: 4). Bearing in mind the comparison of the Confessions and the Poetics in the first volume of Ricoeur's study, we proceed to the biblical narratives and poems Milton draws upon, and find there, as scholars such as Robert Alter and Gerhard Von Rad have shown, a narrative artistry which is already acutely and consistently conscious of its relationship to the concerns of a people living before God in time. Thus the oppositions Ricoeur elucidates can, in the specific case of Samson Agonistes, be pursued in terms of the polarities of design and disorder in the Judges narrative, which is Milton's source, in the patterns of disorientation and reorientation expressed respectively as lamentation and praise in the Psalms, which comprise the very texture of the poem, and in the sense of God's presence and absence which is explored in biblical prophecy. Underlying these considerations is the affirmation of order and purpose in the theology of time in relation to the testing and working out of these affirmations in lived experience.

Another feature of Ricoeur's analysis of narrative which bears upon Milton's adaptation of tragic form for the expression of a biblical subject is his distinction between the episodic and configurational dimensions of narrative:

> . . . every narrative combines two dimensions in various proportions, one chronological and the other nonchronological. The first may be called the episodic dimension, which characterizes the story as made out of events. The second is the configurational dimension according to which the plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events. ("Narrative Time" 178)

Here Ricoeur follows the work of Louis O. Mink whose description of the same dimensions bears implications for the relation between the temporal and the eternal in a poem with a biblical subject:

> Why do stories bear repeating? In some cases, no doubt, because of the pleasure they give, in others because of the meaning they bear. But in any case, if the theory of comprehension is right, because they aim at producing and strengthening the act of understanding in which action and events, although represented as occurring in the order of time, can be surveyed as occurring, as it were, in a single glance as bound together in an order of significance, a representation of the *totum simul* which we can never more than partially achieve. (554)

This act of eliciting pattern or meaning from succession corresponds, according to Ricoeur, to "the 'theme' (dianoia) that accompanies the 'fable' or 'plot' (mythos) of a tragedy" or to the "Point" of a biblical parable ("Narrative Time" 179). A great many prospective ironies accrue in this process since, as readers, we anticipate the outcome of a story we already know. Milton, however, portrays his characters as seeking significance through retrospection as they recollect the events of Samson's life. The Chorus is a focus of the reader's participation in this respect. When, for example, after the visit of Dalila, they declare that God has given men "despotic power" over women, they are eliciting a pattern from a confined, inadequate, and tragic situation.The emblem of the reborn phoenix, on the other hand, is construed after the action has surpassed its tragic confinement.

Parts of this study, and especially the first chapter, call upon Paradise Lost and the Christian Doctrine in order to gain the best possible grasp of how Milton thought about time so as to apply it to a shorter and more limited poem. The relation between typology and accommodation, for example, is a complex subject, as the work of William Madsen, among others, demonstrates. Both concepts matter to Milton, however, for the simple reason that they are, evidently, the ways in which God has chosen to express himself to his creatures. At the risk of simplification, I would suggest that both concepts have to do with the relationship between the individual and Christ, and that Christocentricity is a defining condition of providential history. Typology, as a kind of episodic succession of just or elect individuals, and accommodation, as a mediation of the divine nature and the divine image in which each person is created, should perhaps enhance our perception of the episodic and configurational dimensions of Milton's poems. Where Raphael considers creation and the macrocosm, Samson considers nativity and the microcosm. Where Michael outlines the typological patterns of history, Samson searches for providence in his own brief life. The tragic poem cannot allow for the comprehensive narratives of the epic, and the characters in Samson Agonistes possess fragmented and limited perceptions of history. The Psalms, however, meditate upon God's power in the dimensions of history, creation and individual life. The wealth and density of psalmic reference in Samson Agonistes allow the poem to resonate with the larger patterns.

A philosophical issue which arises out of this consideration, and which should not go unexamined, concerns the adequacy of language, with its tenses of past, present and future, to describe the eternal both in itself and in its relation to the temporal. Richard Gale explores this issue in terms of the "static" and "dynamic" temporal:

> On the one hand, we conceive of time in a dynamic or tensed way, as being the very quintessence of flux and transiency. According to this way of conceiving time, events are represented as being past present and future, and as continually changing in respect to these tensed determinations. . . . This process of temporal becoming is often referred to by various metaphors and aphorisms -- the gnawing tooth of time, the river of time, time flies, here today and gone tomorrow, gather ye rosebuds while ye may, enjoy yourself it's later than you think. This dynamic concept of time lies at the basis of the temporalistic view ;of man and existence which is presented in certain religions, philosophies and works of art. . . . Yet time, in which all things come to be and pass away, necessarily involves a static structure of order. It is, to use T.S. Eliot's phrase, a 'pattern of timeless moments.' . . . This is the static or tenseless way of conceiving time, in which the totality of history is viewed in a God-like manner, all events being given at once in a *nunc stans*. (The Language of Time 7)

In modern philosophy, the problem of relating "these two radically different ways of conceiving or talking about time" (Gale 7) pursues formidable logical propositions which debate the relationship between, and the necessity of, the temporal relations and verb tense determinations which orient events in time.

Milton is, of course, writing poetry, but there is often a keen logical edge on the issues his characters debate which reveals his sensitivity to the problem of time and language. When Adam asks Raphael about the creation, he cannot avoid assigning verb tenses to the actions of the creator:

> what cause
> Mov'd the Creator in his holy Rest
> Through all Eternity so late to build
> In Chaos, and the work begun, how soon
> Absolv'd, if unforbid thou mayst unfold
> What wee, not to explore the secrets ask
> Of his Eternal Empire, but the more
> To magnify his works, the more we know. (VII: 90-97)

Raphael answers:

> to recount Almighty works
> What words or tongue of Seraph can suffice,
> Or heart of man suffice to comprehend?
> Yet what thou canst attain, which best may serve
> To glorify thy Maker, and infer
> Thee also happier, shall not be withheld
> Thy hearing, such Commission from above
> I have receiv'd. to answer thy desire
> Of knowledge within bounds; beyond abstain
> To ask, nor let thine own inventions hope

> Things not reveal'd, which th' invisible King,
> Only Omniscient, hath supprest in Night,
> To none communicable in Earth or Heaven. (VII: 112-124)

Raphael concedes the limitations of language by addressing the report to Adam's "hearing." The temporal succession of words and tenses becomes an aspect of the prescribed or circumscribed limits of creation which Raphael cautions Adam to heed.

Raphael's narrative mediates between the temporal and the eternal in part by emphasizing the willingness of the eternal to condescend to the temporal. Nevertheless, Milton has already portrayed God as speaking in the council in heaven in Book III of the epic. Does the fact of Milton's making God speak concede the impossibility of mediating between the temporal and the eternal in language? Or does the invocation to Book III establish the same "Commission" of accommodation which Raphael, who is still the poet's invention, possesses? The answer must be based on the only tenable principle of mediation available between creature and Creator, for it is the mediation God ordains. This is, of course, the atoning sacrifice of the Son, which is dramatized outside of fallen history in Book III, and which is prefigured in Raphael's descent. This is, of course, a theological principle based on an action which eventually takes place in history. Yet it is the basis of Milton's linguistic mediation between eternity and time, as I shall try to demonstrate.

In the Confessions, Augustine pursues a difficult, perplexing and famous question: "what, then, is time?" Commenting on this question, Gale remarks:

> Augustine's perplexity is not due solely to the *verbal* indefinability of 'time', for, if it were, he just as well could have asked in anguish, 'What, then, is yellow? . . . The difference between time and verbally indefinable words such as 'yellow' is that yellow, unlike time, can be pointed to, and therefore admits of a straightforward ostensible or demonstrative definition. Obviously, there is nothing we can point at and say, 'This is time.' We even cannot ostensively define the past, present and future, of which time is composed according to Augustine. For, by definition, the past and future cannot now be pointed at. (5)

This distinction between the verbally indefinable and the objectively demonstrable comes down to the distinction between time and space, for space has an objective extension which we can point to and recognize. It is a matter of the difference between what we can see and what we can say. The invocation to Book III of Paradise Lost, and indeed the whole of Book III, develops the relationship between eternity and time in terms of seeing and speaking. In the opening lines the poet presents us with the dazzling brightness of God, and then asks if he may speak of this brightness without reproach:

> Hail holy Light, offspring of Heav'n first-born,
> Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam
> May I express thee unblam'd? since God is Light,
> And never but in unapproached Light
> Dwelt from Eternity, dwelt then in thee,
> Bright effluence of bright essence increate.
> Or hear'st thou rather pure Ethereal stream
> Whose Fountain who shall tell? (III: 1-8)

After meditating on his own, physical blindness, the narrator asks for the illumination of the inward, spiritual eye so that he might "see and tell/ Of things invisible to mortal sight" (III: 54-55). The passage provides, of course, some suggestive parallels with Samson's condition. The passage first of all evokes the Son of God, the restorer of sight to the blind, the mediator between God and the individual.

The categories of seeing and telling, normally distinguished as space and time, are brought together in the invocation: the narrator will see *and* tell of spiritual things. Similarly, the narrative resumes with God bending "down his eye,/ His own works and their works at once to view" (III: 58-59) He beholds simultaneously the cosmos, the Son seated at his right hand, the earth, and the "Gulf" between hell and earth where Satan is winging his way towards Eden. The survey of space merges with a survey of time as the Father, speaking in foresight, sees and tells of the Fall. God's examination of the Fall is often dwelt upon in its rigidly logical aspects which may alienate the reader. As Marshall Grossman suggests in his analysis of Book III: "What alienates the reader from the Father's speech is the displacement of the reader's concerns. It is not so much what the Father says that is unsettling, but the fact that he speaks about man, not to man" (57). The Father's speech may emphasize the covenant of law and its requirements which are succeeded by the covenant of grace. The starkly-stated "Die hee or Justice must" (III: 210) recognizes, not the limitations of a legalistic deity, but rather, as an internally divided statement, the lost integrity of the fallen creature.

When the Father appeals for a mediator to atone for humankind, we read that "silence was in Heaven" (III: 218). This silence is often related to the silence in heaven in Revelation 8: 1: "And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour." In applying an event from Revelation to an episode which precedes the Fall, Milton allows first and last things to mirror each other. Duration, however, which is implied in the exact measurement of this silence in Revelation, is an important aspect of both the eternal and the temporal in Milton's thought, as providential history is defined by those divine saving actions which limit and redeem time. When the Son breaks the silence by offering to atone for mankind, he also fills the silence with a narrative of his Incarnation in history. God sees and hears fallen mankind in and through the mediation of the Son. Mankind sees and hears God in the visible and audible Incarnate Word.

The speeches of both the Father and the Son in Book III of Paradise Lost cannot avoid verb tenses. The distinction of tenses in these speeches also helps us to understand Milton's conception of providential time. The Son's account of his act of atonement in history is oriented in the future:

> I for his sake will leave
> Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee
> Freely put off, and for him lastly die
> Well pleas'd, on me let Death wreck all his rage;
> Under his gloomy power I shall not long
> Lie vanquisht; thou hast giv'n me to possess
> Life in myself for ever, by thee I live.(III: 2238-244)

The perception of a spatial separation in the departure of the Son from the Father reflects the way in which the Son's narrative of the saving action he undertakes breaks with the Father's examination of the Fall. Yet the Son's action does not constitute a rejection of the Father's position any more than it constitutes independence. The Son moves, lives and acts in the power and presence of the Father.

This last aspect of the Son's action is an important gloss on the action of Samson Agonistes. The validity of Samson's status as a type of Christ has been debated in recent criticism. Milton's Samson is, in a sense, engaged in the debate himself as, in the inertia of his confinement by the Philistines, he considers what it means to be the "image" of God's strength, and what divine purpose in history his life should have expressed. Like the council in heaven in Book III of Paradise Lost, the middle episodes of Samson Agonistes define and consolidate a tragic action, with emphasis on the consequences of broken covenants, in order to break with this action by reopening the future. For some critics, Samson's decision to attend the Philistine festival, a decision which reverses a previous decision which observed the demands of the law, represents another usurpation of divine authority which rashly, recklessly and independently appropriates vengeance, which is not even an enlightened or humane motive, to the self. For other critics, the reversal, expressed as the impulsive yet silent "motions" of divine grace, represents God entering the action of the poem to restore Samson's covenant of silence and effect a break with a tragic past. Arguments on both sides are impressive, scholarly and deeply felt. My feeling about Milton is that all of his writings, with all of the marshalling of learning and the management of technique, are designed to express his profound conviction of the worth and dignity of the human person as an image or member of God. If this study brings any innovations to the interpretation of this poem, I hope that they will amplify rather than diminish this conviction.

I: THE CONCEPTION OF TIME

More than one critic has noted that time in Paradise Lost is often expressed as an aspect of space. The position of earth in Milton's vividly realized cosmos, suspended between "Realms of light," introduced as Satan's memory of things past, and "Regions of sorrow," which emerge as Satan's present and future, is spatially metaphoric of the forces which contend for a human destiny which unfolds in time. When the Fall becomes a fact, Adam and Michael ascend the highest mountain in Eden and from that commanding spatial prospect survey the "the Race of time,/ Till time stand fixt" (XII: 554-555). This brief phrase asserts the limited and finite nature of all of fallen history; that which limits history is eternity "whose end no eye can reach" (555). This definition of eternity suggests the Hebrew term "olam" which presents eternity as an open-ended span of duration. At the same time, the definition joins metaphorically with the mountain peak

> from whose top
> The Hemisphere of Earth in clearest Ken
> Stretcht out to the amplest reach of prospect lay. (XI:378-380)

Time exists as far as the horizon; beyond the horizon lies eternity. In a complementary fashion, Raphael describes eternity as a place from which he descends and the conditions of which surmount "the reach of human sense." In Raphael's narrative, eternity is an enigmatic yet at times very accessible concept. The fallen world which unfolds in Michael's narrative is no longer the "shadow" of heaven. Yet the mere fact of Michael's presence on earth with Adam after the Fall (like Raphael's presence before it) is a defining feature of the eternal: if fallen time is a dimension of exile and separation from God, it is also a dimension which God, in this case through His messenger, enters into, acts within, and comprehends.

Samson Agonistes does not partake of the Mountain of Vision. Physical space disappears in Samson's blindness, and Samson's idea of providence depends upon the literal events of his nativity as well as the primary moments of Israel's past history with no sense or expectation of their typological fulfilment by the Incarnation. If time extends to the farthest horizon in Paradise Lost, it is tightly and rigorously circumscribed in Milton's tragic poem. And while this circumscription adheres on one level to the neo-classical principle of the unity of time, it is eternity, with respect to the nature of the action Milton's poem imitates, which is the defining, limiting and active principle in the few brief hours in which the action takes place. The interaction of the eternal and the temporal is, in broadest terms, the subject of this dissertation. Before pursuing it in the case of Samson Agonistes, however, we must consider how time and eternity are viewed in western theological and philosophic traditions, how Milton received these traditions, and what his reception implies for the composition of this poem. We must therefore call upon a range of Milton's prose writings and poems, with particular emphasis on the Christian Doctrine and Paradise Lost, before focusing on Samson Agonistes

Although Paradise Lost was first conceived as the tragedy of "Adam Unparadis'd," and the story of Samson is conveyed in tragic form, both poems are often described as "Christian" or "biblical." As such, they do not provide time with the independent stature it often receives in secular tragedy. In Milton's tragic poem, however, the fact of the Fall is the most important element in the conditioning of Milton's tragic vision. The Fall engenders strife and discord within human nature as reason and passion become adversaries, between people, as the potential for a harmonious, unfallen community is lost, and in the world of nature as the sacramental rhythms of Edenic time, where the seasons, in Paradise Lost, are said to dance "hand in hand," yield to the purgatorial cycles of fire and frost. In Book IX of Paradise Lost he complains that the subject of the Fall compels him to change his "Notes to Tragic" (IX:6). Later, as he laments the loss of Eden, he insists that "Sin, not Time, first wrought the change" (IX:70). The dependent and subordinate status Milton gives to time in his poetry serves to demonstrate the independence and freedom of divine providence and the human will, the two entities which must merge if a genuine rather than illusory liberty is to be achieved.The dependent, subordinate status Milton gives to time should be viewed within the conceptual framework he provides in his prose writings, especially the Christian Doctrine, as well as in its fidelity to the scriptural views Milton interprets and recreates in his poetry.

Time gains a measure of independence as people grow conscious of its urgency, value and limitations. The sense of temporal urgency, in the view of Ricardo Quinones, sets the Renaissance world view apart from the medieval:

> Time is not an element that one divines in the men of the Renaissance: it is a force of their consciousness by which they themselves indicate the differences that set apart their new awareness of the world and their place in it from an older one. (3-4)

Renaissance maxims, such as "Truth is the Daughter of Time," encourage a perception of time as an independent force. In Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida, Hector calls time "that old common arbitrator," implying time's role as a regulator of cosmic justice. When Othello's honeymoon is interrupted by public duty, Othello tells Desdemona "we must obey the time," and thereby governs his priorities by the occasion. Shakespeare's sonnets, meanwhile, are a prolonged meditation on the nature of time in all of its aspects.

Milton is aware of the Renaissance sense of temporal urgency. He knew from an early age that he was uniquely suited, if not destined, to write a great work of literature. He also knew that the timing of the composition of his epic, with regard to the stages of his own development and the maturation of his gifts, was critical. He shares the puritan conviction that time is a God-given talent which must be bartered for interest; his nineteenth sonnet is perhaps the greatest expression of this precept. At no stage of his career, however, does Milton give time the stature of an independent force which other Renaissance writers, such as Shakespeare, give to it. It is true that in Sonnet VII, at the age of twenty-three, he calls time the "subtle thief of youth," as he considers that he still has nothing to show -- no "bud" or "blossom" -- from the cultivation of his poetic talent. Even at this early stage of his career, however, the perception of time as a consuming power, established in the first line of the sonnet, is devalued, even quickly devalued, by a developing ethic of patience defined as submission to the temporal ordinances of God. This was to become one of Milton's greatest themes:

> Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
> It shall be still in strictest measure ev'n
> To that same lot, however mean or high,
> Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav'n;
>   All is, if I have grace to use it so,
>   As ever in my great task-Master's eye. (9-14)

It is also true that Milton apostrophizes time in "On Time," a clever "clock" poem designed to ornament a time piece. Here time is set up in order to be belittled. As in Sonnet VII, time plays the role of consumer and destroyer, yet its consuming power is serviceable to God, for time devours "no more than what is false and vain." "On Time" alleviates human anxieties about time, and could be read as an interesting anticipation of Michael's prophecy in the last two books of Paradise Lost.

There is no question that Milton considered time a valuable commodity. Throughout his poetry, however, he shows a marked skepticism of the sense of temporal urgency which leads to misguided and mistimed actions. His idea of patience repudiates the *carpe diem* "argument" of time developed by many Renaissance lyricists. This repudiation is prominent in Comus and Paradise Regained, both of which illustrate Milton's sense of the demonic nature of many of our human anxieties about time. Milton insists that human action which is not part of the will of God is transient and not permanent, and the will of God can only be discovered through waiting. The ethic of patience allows us to consider the sense of temporal urgency and the problem of human action as if under the aspect of eternity in Milton's poetry because patience, as a virtue, reflects the imperturbability of God. While we might expect any religious writer to maintain the subordination of time to eternity, Milton's unique reflections on the nature of time and eternity must be grasped in detail if their ethical and artistic consequences are to be understood.

When time depends upon eternity for definition it is by far the smaller term in the equation. In his Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, Donne calls time an "imaginary, half-nothing. . . . a short parenthesis in a long period" (89). In Religio Medici, Sir Thomas Browne finds the comparative indescribability of eternity both a worthwhile definition and a meaningful measurement:

> Time we may comprehend -- 'tis but five days elder than ourselves, and hath the same horoscope with the world -- but to retire so far back as to apprehend a beginning, to give such an infinite start forward as to conceive an end,in an essence that we affirm hath neither one nor the other- it puts my reason to Saint Paul's sanctuary. My philosophy dares not say the angels can do it: God hath not made a creature that can comprehend him -- 'tis the privilege of his own nature. (11-12)

Time is more easily defined for Browne because language itself takes its passage in time and is bound by the tenses of past, present and future. Eternity cannot be conveyed in language because in eternity there is "no distinction of tenses" (12).

The angel Raphael grapples with the same constraints in Paradise Lost. Adam asks Raphael:

> what cause
> Mov'd the Creator in his holy Rest
> Through all Eternity so late to build
> In *Chaos* , and the work begun, how soon
> Absolv'd. (VII:90-94)

Raphael remarks:

> Immediate are the Acts of God, more swift
> Than time or motion, but to human ears
> Cannot without process of speech be told
> So told as earthly notion can receive. (VII:176-179)

Raphael asserts his need to accommodate his message to the limitations of Adam's understanding. Speech is engaged in time, and time is thereby identified with the limitations of Adam's divinely appointed station. But the limitations themselves are decreed to be transient. In Book V of Paradise Lost, Raphael anticipates that Adam's lot will be "Improv'd by tract of time" if he is found obedient (V:498). The Fall can therefore be viewed as an attempt to cheat time by circumventing God's temporal ordinances.

The range of critical opinion on Milton's use of accommodation has important consequences for the understanding of time in his poetry. Accommodation is the necessity of conveying divine actions or ideas in terms which the human mind can understand. While the problem of accommodation calls attention both to the limitations and innovations of language, it is also a function of genre. Barbara Lewalski contends that Raphael selects genres appropriate to his subject matter with the problem of accommodation foremost in his mind: "the angelic poets may be presumed to realize the highest potential of the various genres, to teach, move and delight Adam and Eve" ("The Genres of Paradise Lost" 98).

While accommodation can be developed into a literary strategy in which the variety of genres possible within the encyclopedic range of the epic allows for a variety of perspectives on a subject, it is fundamentally a problem of conceiving of God's nature in a way which does not demean Him. Milton defines this issue in the Christian Doctrine:

> It is safest for us to form an image of God in our minds which corresponds to his representation and description of himself in the sacred writings. Admittedly, God is always described or outlined not as he really is but in such a way as will make him conceivable to us. Nevertheless, we ought to form just such a mental image of him as he, in bringing himself within the limits of our understanding, wishes us to

> form. Indeed he has brought himself down to our level expressly to prevent our being carried beyond the reach of human comprehension, and outside the written authority of scripture, into vague subtleties of speculation.[1]

Accommodation, or language condescending to the limits of human understanding, becomes a kind of analogy of the Incarnation in the dialogue between Raphael and Adam. Accommodation compares to God taking human form for the sake of humanity for "God, as he really is, is far beyond man's imagination, let alone his understanding" (YP:133). Raphael's visit to Adam in many ways prefigures the Incarnation, for he descends in friendship to reveal as much as is possible concerning God's nature and purpose.

The theory of accommodation bears upon the relationship between time and eternity by raising the question of the similarity between them. Are time and eternity quite literally alike? Are the differences more significant than the similarities? The questions point out the difference between a theological treatise such as the Christian Doctrine, which must close upon supportable assertions, and a poem such as Paradise Lost, which can remain vitally open to its own questions. Raphael encourages Adam's sense of wonder by provoking him with questions:

> what if Earth
> Be but the shadow of Heav'n, and things therein
> Each to other like more than on earth is thought? (V574-576)

Leland Ryken finds Raphael's question illogical: "Since he has just come from Heaven and is thoroughly familiar with the heavenly landscape (witness his subsequent narrative), he should be able to state unequivocally whether Heaven is like the Earth where he is now situated" (24). Raphael might have answered with less equivocation. The question should be recognized, however, as a technique rather than as an inconsistency. The question mirrors the vitality of Adam's inquiry by stressing the tension between the literal and figurative aspects of accommodation. It also emphasizes the creaturely status which Adam and Raphael share. Raphael does not have the vantage point of God's eternity: as a creature, he exists in a continuum of duration, and his relative status depends, like Adam's, on obedience. Raphael and Adam are both formed for contemplation, and their encounter illustrates Milton's sense of the value of time spent on the ethical implications of momentous questions.

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[1] John Milton, Christian Doctrine, Bk. I, Ch. II, in The Complete Prose Works of John Milton, Vol. VI (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), 133-134. All references to the Christian Doctrine are to this edition. References to Milton's other prose works are to John Milton: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes, with the single exception of the Seventh Prolusion, referred to in the fourth chapter, which is taken from The Prose of John Milton, ed. J. Max Patrick (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 14.

The degree to which the temporal and eternal realms correspond becomes an open question answered by a divergence of critical opinion. At issue is a clear understanding of the way in which the eternal expresses itself in and through the temporal. The visits of Raphael and Michael in Paradise Lost, and the "rousing motions" which lead Samson to the temple, are examples of such manifestations. Mary-Ann Radzinowicz has classified the different critics who take on this question under three headings: the Platonists, the typologists, and a third group of eclectic reconcilers who mediate between the first two positions. Raphael's provocative suggestion that earth may be the shadow of heaven is a point of departure for these positions.

The "Platonist-humanists" argue that "through Raphael, Milton is telling us that the earthly copy of eternal truth is a fleeting shadow but also an accurate analogue of divine reality, that the poet may therefore derive symbols and metaphors from the world of reality and use them to tell truths higher than merely earthly truths" (Towards Samson Agonistes 308). Ryken points out that when Raphael implies that earth may be the shadow of heaven, he is responding to the immediate problem of accommodation. Thus "the immediate context of Raphael's statement, stressing different levels in the scale of being . . . points to a Platonic meaning, with its analogy between earthly and heavenly existence" (26). Metaphoric language, or "lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms"(V:573), becomes a means of revelation when, as Radzinowicz says, "reality is a metaphor or imitation or shadow of truth" (Towards Samson Agonistes 309).

In the typological approach, on the other hand, the temporal and the eternal are not primarily related by vertical correspondence. Rather, God's will is revealed as it unfolds partially and progressively along a horizontal axis of time. From this position, earth is the shadow of heaven insofar as God's providence is adumbrated in a framework of typological relationships completed by the Incarnation. As Michael tells Adam, providence moves from

> shadowy Types to Truth, from Flesh to Spirit,
> From imposition of strict Laws, to free
> Acceptance of large Grace, from servile fear
> To filial, works of Law to works of Faith. (XII:303-306)

The third, "eclectic" position identified by Radzinowicz recognizes a fruitful tension, if not a complementarity, between the Platonic and typological perspectives. This position is summarized by Ryken:

> Considered together, the doctrine of accommodation, the Platonic theory of Ideas, and Christian humanism constitute the theoretic underpinning of Milton's apocalyptic vision. If we integrate the various strands of philosophy and literary theory, we find that they correspond and reinforce one another to a remarkable extent. All of the theoretic aspects provide a foundation for a portrayal of apocalyptic reality in physical, human terms. At the same time, they do not minimize a very real difference between the visible and invisible worlds, and they show that the apocalyptic vision is, in important ways, not directly accessible to human experience. (42-43)

This debate is of considerable importance to Samson Agonistes, even though it is the only one of Milton's three major poems with no angelic consistories or transcendent vantage points. Yet it is precisely this quality which intensifies our sense of that which lies beyond, as well as within , our experience. The angelic visitation at Samson's nativity, when his mission is foretold, is a report from the past. The destruction of the pagan temple, with its obvious apocalyptic overtones, takes place off stage in accordance with classical propriety, and is also verbally reported. The burden of interpretation is perhaps that much greater when the vantage point is limited to that of fallen humanity. Samson is aware that his unique gift is somehow symbolic, that he is the "image" of God's strength. Yet his blindness, caused by his own failures, underscores the inaccessibility of the revelation which discloses, or indeed adumbrates, Samson's own significance. Like the "choice of sun or shade" on the bank where Samson rests, the interplay of light and dark throughout the poem sustains a typological resonance.

Basically, typology is " the comparison of an event or series of events in the past with an event or series of events in the present or immediate future" (A Dictionary of Christian Theology 5). Northrop Frye's definition in The Great Code elaborates the temporal and historical emphasis of typology:

> What typology really is as a mode of thought, what it both assumes and leads to, is a theory of history, or more accurately of historical process: an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what the meaning or point is, and so become an antitype of what has happened previously. Our modern confidence in historical progress, our belief that despite apparent confusion, even chaos, in human events, nevertheless those events are going somewhere and indicating something, is probably a legacy of Biblical typology. (The Great Code 80-81)

The typological perspective is especially prominent in Saint Paul's interpretation of Old Testament events. In Romans 5:14 he writes: "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him who was to come."

If we use Saint Paul's statement as a link between the narratives of Raphael and Michael in Paradise Lost, we recognize that both narratives, in spite of their wealth of episodes and details, are fundamentally concerned with discovering the relationship between Adam and the Son. Raphael begins with God's proclamation of the Son's exaltation above the rest of the heavenly host:

> This day have I begot whom I declare
> My only Son, and on this holy Hill

> Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
> At my right hand. (V:603-606)

The event seems to precipitate Satan's rebellion, but Adam must also recognize in the exaltation of the Son an analogy of the free gift of life which Adam has received from God. The creation of man and the exaltation of the Son are not similar in kind. But both are acts of grace, and so a vertical correspondence between the earthly and heavenly "Adams" is established.

Michael's narrative culminates with the crucifixion which, like the exaltation, takes place on a hill, as does Adam's visionary experience of it. Type and antitype are now separated in time as first and second "Adams." Yet their relationship is still defined by the action of grace, an action Adam now depends upon in his fallen state. Michael's narrative of the crucifixion inspires in Adam the same awe and reverence accorded to the Son on the day of his heavenly exaltation. The crucifixion, which is related by Michael, manifests the eternal glorification of the Son, which is related by Raphael, in the context of fallen history. The "vertical" correspondences of Raphael's narrative and the "horizontal," typological linkages of Michael's narrative are therefore mutually supportive.

In order to verify this further, let us consider the way in which Raphael's narrative functions as a prophecy of fallen history, a function which, at the time of the narrative, is still latent because the Fall has not yet happened.[2] The prophetic potential is most apparent in the specific time references which Raphael uses. In the account of the War in Heaven, Raphael tells us that the Son rides forth to effect the final victory over Satan and his legions on the third day of the war. Raphael's use of the word

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[2] The catalogue of demons in Book I of Paradise Lost emphasizes the earthly names under which the demons will appear after the Fall (I: 330-521). The cults of idolatry surrounding the names are perhaps latent narratives which are quarantined in Hell until fallen history begins. The "latency" ~~of~~ Raphael's narrative as prophecy anticipates, in sharp opposition to idolatry, the introduction of prophecy by divine grace into fallen history, and defines prophecy as being in part, as it is for Adam, the exercise of the highest contemplative faculties of the mind.

"day" is certainly metaphoric or, in other words, a means of accommodation. Yet it clearly prophesies Christ's victory over Satan through the crucifixion and resurrection which span a period of three literal days. The Incarnation divides the span of earthly time as we commonly mark it.

In addition to the Incarnation, the divine events which define and limit the course of earthly time are the Creation and the Apocalypse or Last Judgment. Each event possesses its unique action and characteristic imagery, but Milton brings these events into a relationship of analogy by carefully superimposing the actions and imagery of each one onto the other. The War in Heaven, for example, prefigures the Apocalyptic struggle at the end of earthly time, and indeed has its source in the Book of Revelation. In Milton's treatment of it, the war both precedes the creation of the earth and manifests Christ's death and resurrection, through its three day time span, at the centre of history. In the same way, Milton's account of the Creation prefigures the Incarnation by emphasizing the Son's departure from the Father and Heaven as he goes forth to fulfill his role as the agent of divine creation. And in the act of creation the Son prefigures the Apocalypse when, like a judge, he separates the light from the darkness and purges creation of adverse and contrarious elements:

> His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspread,
> And vital virtue infus'd, and vital warmth
> Throughout the fluid Mass, but downward purg'd
> The black tartareous cold Infernal dregs
> Adverse to life. (VII:235-239)

And when God separates the waters from the dry land, we read that the waters respond "as Armies at the call/Of Trumpet" (VII:295-296). The image clearly prefigures the cosmic battles of Revelation.

In these examples we encounter what Stanley Fish has called Milton's "insistence on simultaneity."[3] The technique of simultaneity not only approximates, as far as language will allow, the eternal vantage point of God on behalf of the reader. It also reveals that God's actions in time are to be identified with the freedom and creativity of His nature. Moreover, as W.B. Hunter observes, "unifying this disparate material is a single theme: the victorious exaltation of the Son of God" (123). If all of the acts of God which define the course of time are, as Hunter argues, "simultaneously and metaphorically present in the one narrative framework," (123) then the triumph of providence in the cosmic struggle between good and evil is confirmed in the structure of the poem.

When Raphael undertakes to narrate the events of pre-creation history for Adam, he explains that the language of accommodation is needed because eternity is beyond the reach of human understanding:

> what surmounts the reach
> Of human sense, I shall delineate so,
> By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms,
> As may express them best. (V:571-574)

There is an echo of Raphael's phrase in Samson Agonistes. When Samson leaves for the pagan temple, the Chorus remarks: "How thou wilt here come off surmounts my reach" (1380). Samson has felt the motions of grace, but there is no divine interpreter and relater in this poem to explain these motions to the Chorus or to the reader. The statement of the Chorus defines a tightly circumscribed sphere in which the price of experience is dear and wisdom must be groped for. Nevertheless, Samson Agonistes is an authentic adumbration of eternal providence within a confined temporal framework which adheres to the neo-classical precept of the unity of time: "The circumscription of time wherein the whole Drama begins and ends, is according to ancient rule, and best example, within the space of 24 hours" (Preface). Samson Agonistes is only limited by the limited nature of the hero's role in the progressive revelation of divine purpose.

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[3] See Surprised By Sin, 31. This is Fish's articulation of a feature of Paradise Lost which is also articulated by Jackson Cope (14-15) and Isabel McCaffrey (53), both of whom are quoted at length by Fish. Simultaneity implies that the reader takes in the view of history presented in the poem in and from a single vantage point. Since language is bound to time, however, this vantage point (which is itself a spatial concept) requires the organization and amalgamation of spatial perspectives. The mountain top which Adam and Michael stand on in Books XI-XII is an earthly analogy of God's "holy hill" in heaven, and both are places from which time is viewed in its entirety. In Samson Agonistes it serves Milton's purpose to reinforce our experience of fallen space as the confinement of a prison house and fallen time through the succession of episodes and the repetition of memories.

Like Adam, Samson maintains two distinct relationships to the Son, for while he has no visionary knowledge of the Son, as Adam does, both Samson and his nation, represented by the Chorus, express the sense of messianic expectation which is an implicit theme in Judges, the source of the Samson story. The relationships expressed "vertically" in Raphael's narrative and "horizontally" in Michael's are expressed in Samson Agonistes through deliverance (the Hebrew word "messiah" means deliverer) as Samson's immediate understanding of his relationship to God the Father, and through typology, as his implied and essentially unknown relationship to the future advent of the Son.[4] Here too, it is important to recognize that the two relationships are mutually supportive and not inconsistent. Both concern Samson's conformity to the divine image in which all people are created, an image which, for fallen humanity, is recognizable primarily in the Son (aware of God's former acts of deliverance but unaware of the Incarnation, the Chorus in Samson Agonistes perceives in Samson an "image" of God's strength). Milton's definition of regeneration in the Christian

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[4] Although typology should include his relationship to past, known events of deliverance such as the Exodus, Moses is, as MacCallum has noted , absent from the poem, reflecting a "highly selective" historic consciousness on the part of the Hebrew characters ("The Deliverer as Judge" 264). Fragmented is another way of putting it, since fragmentation reflects the dissonances of fallen history which the structure of Samson Agonistes seeks to comprehend.

Doctrine, for example, emphasizes the relationship between the "old" and "new" Adams:

> REGENERATION means that THE OLD MAN IS DESTROYED AND THAT THE INNER MAN IS REGENERATED BY GOD THROUGH THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT SO THAT HIS WHOLE MIND IS RESTORED TO THE IMAGE OF GOD, AS IF HE WERE A NEW CREATURE. MOREOVER THE WHOLE MAN, BOTH SOUL AND BODY, IS SANCTIFIED TO GOD'S SERVICE AND TO GOOD WORKS. (YP:461) [5]

The collapse of the temporal distance between the old and the new creature parallels the collapse of the distance between the creature and God caused by sin. Both the Incarnation, which authorizes a typological reading of the Bible, and redemption, which, as the *telos* of history, validates our understanding of the complex of relationships typology describes, are part of a pattern of divine actions which constitute the shape and meaning of time in Milton's Christian vision. As a poet, Milton seeks to deepen his reader's experience of time by opening the perpetual possibility as well as unique significance of these events.

Raphael says that he will apply accommodative language to what "surmounts the reach of human sense." The phrase suggests that eternity is not entirely beyond human comprehension, but is only partially or selectively so. Paradise Lost speculates richly on the resemblance of heaven and earth, and this resemblance implies the similarity of time and eternity. This similarity may only consist in the fact that God does new things, as in the exaltation of the Son. It would now be worthwhile to examine Milton's conception of eternity in light of the philosophical and theological traditions he both inherits and departs from. Milton says that his Christian Doctrine is part of a "process of restoring religion to something of its pure original state, after it had been defiled with impurities for more than thirteen hundred years" (YP:117). His view of divine action as a central, defining criterion of time and history, with its correspondent or analogous implications for our understanding of eternity, appears to divest, perhaps in an idealized way, the influence of centuries of tradition. Since these traditions are not and perhaps cannot be entirely discarded, it might be better to think of Milton as subordinating them to scripture and using them in support of certain pre-eminent biblical principles which concentrate on the creative changes providence makes to a human nature conditioned by its own self-willed and destructive changes.

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[5] Regeneration is introduced here as an aspect of redemption which is the goal or *telos* of history in order to illustrate the range of Milton's typological thought. I do not reject the notion that Samson is in some sense regenerate by the end of the poem. I do, however, wish to avoid aligning this study with criticism which uses Milton's theology of regeneration as the solution to the objection, first made by Dr. Johnson, that the poem has no real middle. This approach often equates a progressive sequence of stages in regeneration with the structure of the poem. I wish to explore other approaches to Samson's eventual illumination, including how features of biblical poetry, especially the Psalms, might add to or enhance our understanding of the structure. The term regeneration will therefore be used as precisely as possible in a specific context, as , for example, this illustration of a typological pattern, or as an aspect of Milton's concept of liberty. The broader and critically more neutral term "redemption" could apply to Samson's experience because redemption is a synonym for both the "vindication" the biblical Samson prays for and the "deliverance" which Milton's Samson continually contemplates both for himself and his people. This point is maintained and developed in subsequent chapters, especially chapters 2 and 5.

Although Raphael concedes the limited ability of language to convey the "immediate" acts of God, his narrative elaborates a pre-creation history in which chronology has significance. Pre-creation history implies the existence of some form of time "in" eternity, before the existence of the world. Raphael describes the occasion of the Son's exaltation:

> As yet this World was not, and Chaos wild
> Reign'd where these Heav'ns now roll, where Earth now rests
> Upon her Centre pois'd, when on a day
> (For Time, though in Eternity, appli'd
> By present, past, and future) on such day
> As Heav'n's great Year brings forth, th'Empyreal Host
> Of Angels by Imperial summons call'd
> Forthwith from all the ends of Heav'n appear'd. (V:577-586)

The passage blends Plato's idea of the Great Year or periodic return of the planets to their original positions with Aristotle's scientific conception of time as the measure of motion. There are, however, no planetary motions for time to measure before creation.

Clearly these theoretical and empirical definitions are subordinate to the divine action which creates the occasion. We could go further and say that the motions which make time can only be the motions of divine grace, the same motions Samson experiences in his recovery.

With this priority established, Milton is clearly unconcerned about the existence of some kind of temporal continuum in eternity. This unorthodox notion (an unorthodoxy which is, like all unorthodoxies, not necessarily a heresy) marks Milton's departure from the conception of eternity established by Saint Augustine and passed on to Boethius, Aquinas, and the reformers of Milton's own era. The tradition Milton departs from is perhaps as strongly influenced by Plato's Timaeus as it is by scripture. The influence of the Timaeus on the Christian world view is due in part to its clear affinities to the creation story found in Genesis, as well as in its ability to offer a clearer schematic definition of the nature of creation than is available in Genesis.[6] So great are these affinities that a number of early Christian theologians wondered if Plato had come into contact with scripture either in written form while on his travels or by word of mouth. In the Timaeus, for example, Plato says that God made the universe because he is good and free from envy, and wanted to convey as much of his goodness as possible on his creation:

> Let us therefore state the reason why the framer of the universe of change framed it at all. He was good, and what is good has no particle of envy in it; being therefore without envy he wished all things to be as like himself as possible. This is as valid a principle for the origin of the

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[6] It should be noted, however, that Plato's conception of the immortality of the soul is anathema to much Christian thought. The idea of the transmigration of the soul, outlined in the Republic, informs the theology of the Timaeus: "The soul, as divine, is immortal, but destined not for a single life on earth but for many" (Lee, "Introduction to Timaeus and Critias" 9). Augustine vigorously objects to this aspect of Platonic thought, even while drawing on the Christian affinities of the Platonic tradition.

> world of change as we shall discover from the wisdom of men, and we should accept it. (42)

For Augustine, Plato's reasoning illuminates the account of creation in Genesis 1:4: "And God saw the light, that it was good." Comparing the Timaeus to Genesis in the City of God, Augustine supposes: "Plato may have read this passage of Scripture or have learnt of it from those who had read it; or it may be that with the intuition of genius he observed the 'invisible realities of God' presented to the mind by means of his creation, or learned about them from those who had thus observed them" (XI:21).

Pre-Socratic philosophers such as Heraclitus and others teach that strife and flux are the permanent condition of time. In response to such doctrines, philosophers have searched, as Bertrand Russell maintains, "with great persistence, for something not subject to the empire of Time" (47). The search for a "conception of eternity as not persistence through endless time, but existence outside the whole temporal process" (46) leads from Parmenides to Plato where, as Joseph Mogan points out, "we find for the first time the emphasis on individual immortality and the unqualified assertion of the supersensuous and invisible Hereafter" (22). This assessment underscores Plato's Christian affinities. Plato's basic distinction between the realm of "becoming," which is the visible, created world of change, sense and motion, and the higher realm of "being," the changeless realm of intellect, forms and ideas, corresponds to the Christian distinction between the temporal and the eternal. Plato makes the distinction early in the dialogue:

> We must in my opinion begin by distinguishing between that which always is and never becomes from that which is always becoming but never is. The one is apprehensible by intelligence with the aid of reasoning, being eternally the same, the other is the object of opinion and irrational sensation, coming to be and ceasing to be, but never fully real. In addition, everything that becomes or changes must do so owing to some cause; for nothing can come to be without a cause. (Timaeus 40)

The last statement raises a question which is central to the influence of the Timaeus on Christian ideas of time: has the world always existed, or did it come into existence?

Plato argues that, since the visible, changeable world belongs to the realm of becoming, it must have come into existence:

> As for the world . . . we must ask about it the question one is bound to ask to begin with about anything: whether it has always existed and had no beginning, or whether it has come into existence and started from some beginning. The answer is that it has come into being; for it is visible, tangible and corporeal, and therefore perceptible by the senses, and, as we saw, sensible things are objects of opinion and sensation and therefore change and come into being. (41)

There must logically, therefore, be a "maker and father of the universe," whom Plato posits as a craftsman or "demiurge." Plato contends that "the world is beautiful and its maker good. . . . for the world is the fairest of all things that have come into being and he is the best of causes" (43). This makes a plain comparison to the refrain in the Genesis account of creation: "and God saw that it was good." Milton's version in Paradise Lost conveys a strong Platonic element, as God views the world "In prospect from his Throne, how good, how fair,/Answering his great Idea" (VII:556-557).

A second question arising out of Plato's account of creation makes his influence on the Christian conception of time decisive: if the world has come into being, did it do so at some point in time, or did time itself come into being along with the world? Plato endorses the second view. The world is not eternal, and cannot attain eternity. But the craftsman, seeking to make the world as much like the eternal as possible, created a "moving image of eternity" -- which is time -- as a condition which manifests the likeness of the temporal and the eternal:

> The nature of the Living Being was eternal, and it was not possible to bestow this attribute fully on the created universe; but he determined to make a moving image of eternity, and so when he ordered the heavens he made in that which we call time an eternal moving image of the eternity which remains forever at one. For before the heavens came into being there were no days or nights or months or years, but he devised and brought them into being at the same time that the heavens were put together. (Timaeus 51)

Plato's thinking on this question strongly influenced Christian interpretations of the first sentence of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." In the passage from the Timaeus quoted above, the creation of time has the quality of an afterthought about it, and is perhaps designed to serve Plato's purpose of illustrating the difference between being and becoming. At issue in the Christian interpretation of the problematic phrase "In the beginning" is the nature of a history which manifests God's "eternal" purpose. Plato lacks the sense of history which is the unique legacy of the Bible:

> Plato knew nothing of historicity. He knew nothing of a history in which irrevocable, eternal decisions are made, but looked calmly upon a never-ending temporal process in which what does not succeed today is someday accomplished by divine guidance. He had no awareness of the unique, concrete, historical time in which there is not a moment to be lost, in which every opportunity must be seized upon . . . . (Jaspers 54)

The Timaeus is one of the few of Plato's dialogues which Augustine had at first hand. Generally speaking, his references to the writings of the "platonists" seem to mean the neo-platonic tradition of Plotinus, Porphyry and others. Nevertheless, Augustine, perhaps the most influential Christian theologian on the subject of time and history, seized upon the Timaeus as an accurate and possibly inspired analogy of the creation story in Genesis. The affinities between the Timaeus and Genesis led a number of early theologians, including Eusebius, Origen and Justin Martyr, to speculate on Plato's acquaintance with scripture. Augustine reasons that Plato was already dead when "Ptolemy, king of Egypt, ordered from Judaea a copy of the prophetic writings of the Hebrew people and had them translated into Greek" (VII:11). Yet Augustine remained convinced that the affinities were more than a coincidence:

> . . . what impresses me most, and almost brings me to agree that Plato cannot have been unacquainted with the sacred books is that when the angel gave Moses the message from God, and Moses asked the name of him who gave the command to go and free the Hebrew people from Egypt, he received this reply, "I am HE WHO IS, and you will say to the sons of Israel, "HE WHO IS has sent me to you." This implies that in comparison with him who really is, because he is unchangeable, the things created changeable have no real existence. This truth Plato vigorously maintained and diligently taught. (VIII:11)

In his development of a Christian philosophy of time and history, Augustine recognized that the most pernicious objections to the providential scheme are the possibility of the eternal existence of the world and the notion of endless cyclic recurrence in history and individual life. Saint Paul's dictum that "Christ died once" indicates, for Augustine, the unique, finite, and once-and-for-all nature of temporal events in the Christian perspective. The validity of the claim is apparent when the nature of time is understood. Plato assists Augustine with the argument that time itself is a creature. Hence the notion of a time before the creation of the world makes no sense. "What time could there have been that was not created by you?" Augustine asks in the Confessions, "How could time elapse if it never was?" (XI:13). Augustine is replying to the notorious question of what God was doing before the creation of the world. Why did God make the world when he did? Adam frames a similar question, which I have previously quoted, in his dialogue with Raphael:

> what cause
> Mov'd the Creator in his holy Rest
> Through all Eternity so late to build
> In *Chaos* , and the work begun, how soon
> absolv'd. (VII:90-94)

Raphael warns Adam to stay within his prescribed bounds:

> beyond abstain
> To ask, nor let thine own inventions hope
> Things not reveal'd, which th'invisible King,
> Only Omniscient, hath suppress in Night,
> To none communicable in Earth or Heaven. (VII:120-124)

Milton does not indulge in the commonplace supposition that God, before creation, was building a hell for people who dabble in these kinds of questions. From Adam's point of view it is a natural, healthy, though vast inquiry. Milton himself, in the Christian Doctrine, shows impatience with the idea that God occupied himself from eternity with matters pertaining to the period of human history:

> it would clearly be disproportionate for God to have been totally occupied from eternity in decreeing things which it was to take him only six days to create: things which were to be governed in various ways

> for a few thousand years, and then finally either received into an unchanging state with God for ever, or else thrown away. (YP:299)

To suggest that God was so occupied, in other words, is to provide a superficial answer to an unfathomable question: "Anyone who asks what God did before the creation of the world is a fool; and anyone who answers him is not much wiser"(YP:299).

Augustine's attitude is similar to Milton's: humility in the face of the unanswerable is a form of wisdom:

> My answer to those who ask 'what was God doing before he made heaven and earth?' is not 'He was preparing Hell for people who pry into mysteries'. This frivolous retort has been made before now, so we are told, in order to evade the point of the question. But it is one thing to make fun of the questioner and another to find the answer. So I shall refrain from giving this reply. (Confessions XI:12).

For Augustine, the question itself loses meaning when God's eternal vantage point is understood. As a created entity, time is a condition which cannot be imposed on God, for God beholds all time in an unchanging present:

> Your years neither go nor come, but our years pass and others come after them, so that they all may come in their turn. Your years are completely present to you all at once, because they are at a permanent standstill. They do not move on, forced to give way before the advance of others, because they never pass at all. . . . Your years are one day, yet your day does not come daily but is always today, because your today does not give place to any tomorrow nor does it take the place of any yesterday. Your today is eternity. (Confessions XI:13)

Augustine's conception of God's eternal vantage point along with the co-creation of time with the world became part of the orthodox mainstream of Christian thought. Boethius acknowledges the Timaeus in his Consolation of Philosophy, a work which in turn influenced Saint Thomas Aquinas:

> Therefore, they are wrong who, having heard that Plato held that this world did not have a beginning in time and would never come to an end, suppose that the created world is coeternal with its Creator. For it is one thing to live an endless life, which is what Plato ascribed to the world, and another for the whole of unending life to be embraced all at once as present, which is clearly proper to the divine mind. (116)

In Book III of Paradise Lost, Milton describes God's "prospect high,/ Wherein past, present, future he beholds"(77-78).

Plato's definition of time stresses the similarity between time and eternity. Augustine's motives in following Plato are very different, for he is concerned to stress their absolute difference. Augustine resembles Milton as a man whose writings were engaged in, and even provoked by, the political and historic crises of his times. The City of God, written between 413 and 421 A.D., was written to counter the widespread opinion that the capture of Rome by Gothic invaders in 410 A.D. was caused by the defection of the Roman people from their traditional deities, who supposedly would have protected them, to the new religion of Christianity. The City of God therefore seeks to discern the providential patterns which underlie the vicissitudes of prosperity and adversity. The fall of Rome was as much a disaster for Christians as it was for pagans, however. Many Christians had identified the "eternal city" of a Christianized Rome with the earthly stability of the Kingdom of God, an attitude comparable to some of the millenarian expectations in Milton's England. In recovering the Christian vision of history from the ruins of Rome, Augustine established the elect community in a transcendent "City of God" which can have no earthly stability because earth is merely the place of its pilgrimage. Augustine calls Christianity the "royal road, which alone leads to that kingdom whose glory is not the tottering grandeur of the temporal, but the secure stability of the eternal" (City of God X:31).

The unique, sufficient and never-to-be-repeated nature of the Incarnation defined by Saint Paul in Romans 6:9 is the foundation of Augustine's conception of history. The Incarnation is the unique fact which repudiates theories of endless cyclic recurrence found in Platonism and Stoicism. The "theorists" Augustine opposes sound like the devils in Milton's hell who

> reason'd high
> Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,
> Fixt Fate, Free Will, Foreknowledge absolute,

And found no end, in wand'ring mazes lost. (II:558-561)

Augustine remarks in the City of God:

> The following verse I think suits our theorists very neatly, "The ungodly will walk in a circle'; not because their life is going to come round again in the course of those revolutions which they believe in, but because the way of their error, the way of false doctrine, goes round in circles. (XII:14)

As in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Augustine's true way or "royal road" is a metaphor for the Incarnation. The failure of "platonist" writers to grasp the Incarnation becomes a measure of their inadequacy. In the Confessions, Augustine describes his attraction to philosophic writings, but recollects that "Platonist teaching might have swept me from my foothold on the solid ground of piety" (VII:20). The distinction between "teaching" and "piety" is an important part of Augustine's view of time. Platonic teaching represents an aspiration towards the timeless, symbolized, for example, in Raphael's *School of Athens* by Plato's upward-pointing finger. It is contemplation which escapes time, as Milton suggests in Il Penseroso, a title which itself suggests contemplation. The "spirit of Plato" unfolds

> What Worlds, or what vast Regions hold
> The immortal mind that hath forsook
> Her mansion in this fleshly nook. (90-92)

The Incarnation is precisely the opposite movement. In the "Nativity Ode," Christ

> Forsook the Courts of everlasting Day,
> And chose with us a darksome House of mortal Clay. (13-14)

"Piety" is not an uninquiring or anti-intellectual posture of belief: it is the recognition that revelation, particularly the doctrine of the Incarnation, transforms the basis of reasoning by grounding it in what Karl Jaspers calls a "temporally determined, historically decisive faith" (84). The distinction is an important aspect of the Son's rejection of classical learning in Paradise Regained. The temptation is governed by the tension between contemplation and action, especially misguided or untimely action. The same tension informs Samson Agonistes, where it is perhaps better defined under the more general headings of words versus deeds. The temptation to learning is unusual, for while other temptations invite the Son to enter history at the wrong time in the wrong way, through military force or conventional political manipulation, the temptation to learning invites the Son to withdraw from history into what is an analogy, or perhaps a parody, of a timeless realm. The academy Satan describes is really a *hortus conclusus*. This reminds us that Adam was formed for contemplation. It also reminds us that the recovery of the lost Eden depends upon the Son's intervention in fallen history, the proper symbol of which is not a garden but a desert. As Augustine would, the Son tells Satan that the classics fall short of knowing "how the world began, and how man fell"(312), which is to say that they do not know providential history.

Augustine's rejection of a temporal continuum outside the allotted span of earthly history safeguards the uniqueness of providential events against the possibility of perpetual cyclic recurrence. Commentaries on Genesis in Milton's era tend to concur with Augustine's point of view by interpreting the phrase "In the Beginning" as meaning the beginning of time (Williams 41). The account of creation in Genesis sets forth the work in the specific time frame of six days. The six day time frame can be interpreted as another instance of accommodation which makes God's creative labour comprehensible to us in terms of succession. The word "day" is therefore metaphoric, as Sir Thomas Browne says:

> Some believe there went not a minute to the world's creation, nor shall there go to its destruction; those six days, so punctually described, make not to them one moment, but rather seem to manifest the method and idea of that great work in the intellect of God, than the manner of how he proceeded in its operation. (48)

Raphael describes the six days work in Paradise Lost, while God says he will create another world "in a moment"(VII:154). Martin Luther, on the other hand, is prepared to accept the literal sense of the six day time frame:

> we assert that Moses spoke in the literal sense, not allegorically or figuratively, i.e., that the world, with all its creatures, was created within six days, as the words read. If we do not understand the reason

> for this, let us remain pupils and leave the job of teacher to the Holy Spirit. (Lectures on Genesis 5).

Like Milton in the Christian Doctrine, Luther is acknowledging that certain matters are impenetrably hidden in mystery: "because He is incomprehensible, that, too, is incomprehensible which was before the world, because it is nothing except God" (Lectures on Genesis 18). There are points of theology in which silence is the only available wisdom.

For Milton, however, silence must be the genuine rather than the imposed limit of his own enterprising reason. In the Christian Doctrine, Milton represents his interpretation of the spirit of reformed theology by idealizing the convergence of his own reason, divested of received opinion, with the scriptures. To ask what God was doing before creation is folly if it means fathoming his inscrutable will. If it means contemplating the motions of providence before creation then it is not folly at all. Northrop Frye reflects something of this temperament in The Great Code:

> The Creation was an absolute beginning, and to ask what God was doing before the Creation is a question in bad taste .. But to be told that we should not ask a question merely increases its urgency, in any healthy mind. The nearest we can get to an answer, perhaps, is to say that we experience time in such a way that we cannot imagine a beginning to it, and the reason for postulating an absolute beginning in the Bible is to make it clear that time does not represent an ultimate reality. (71)

Augustine denies the ultimate reality of time by assigning it a creaturely status. His view is influenced by Plato's Timaeus and initiates the mainstream of Christian thinking. In both the Christian Doctrine and Paradise Lost, Milton finds it both reasonable and justifiable to posit the existence of a temporal continuum before the creation of the world. It may not be the kind of time we measure or experience in the fallen world, but Milton clearly indicates that there is time in eternity. In spite of this unorthodox view, Milton does not assign the value of an ultimate reality to time as we understand it. In Book XII of Paradise Lost, Adam tells Michael that his vision has

> Measur'd this transient World, the Race of time,
> Till time stand fixt: beyond is all abyss,

Eternity, whose end no eye can reach. (554-556)

Nor does Milton's view compromise Augustine's hard-won victories over pagan superstitions which infer ultimate realities from the cycles of nature. Milton resembles Augustine in his struggle against these notions, and this struggle is a basic feature of Samson Agonistes. Rather, Milton seeks to isolate the false and illusory sense of time reflected in pagan rituals of the kind Samson overturns from a sense of a genuine, value-laden and meaningful time which consists of the motions of divine providence. Insofar as his poetry encourages this time sense in his readers, Milton's work could be defined, as he believed it would be, as a kind of prophecy.

Unlike Augustine, Milton has no difficulty accepting the existence of a stretch of time before the creation of the world. At least four of the ideas developed in the Christian Doctrine illustrate his thinking on this issue, and all four pertain in various ways to the creation. These are his ideas concerning the angels, who are the witnesses of creation, his idea of an *ex deo* rather than an *ex nihilo* creation, his idea of matter, of which creation is comprised, and his idea of the trinity, specifically the Son of God who is the agent of creation.

Milton's idea of angelic life is in some ways the simplest illustration. In the argument to Book I of Paradise Lost, Milton advises us, as we discover the fallen angels in hell, that "Heaven and Earth may be suppos'd as not yet made, certainly not yet accurst." Milton goes on to point out "that Angels were long before this visible Creation, was the opinion of many ancient Fathers." This last remark is surely a tacit acknowledgment of his unorthodox opinion of chronology. Here again, Augustine represents the voice of traditional opinion. He concedes that scripture is not explicit on this point, but he identifies the creation of the angels with the creation of light given that angels, as the name Lucifer suggests, are creatures of light (City of God XI:9). Like Augustine, Milton cites Job 38:7 to defend his own very different opinion: "The fact that they shouted for joy before God at the creation . . . proves that they were then already created, not that they were first created at that time" (YP:313). Milton also believes that heaven, or the abode of God and the angels, was created at a point in time before the creation:

> It is not likely that God built a dwelling-place of this kind for his majesty only the day before yesterday, only, that is, from the beginning of the world. . . . why should I believe that it was made at the same time as the fabric of this world, and not ages before? But it does not follow that heaven is eternal, nor, if it is eternal, that it is God. *For God could always produce any effect he pleased both when and how he chose.* (YP:311-312, italics mine)

In this last statement, we find the most consistent emphasis which emerges out of Milton's rejection of orthodox chronologies of creation: the absolute and unconstrained freedom of God to act at any point in time.

As Laurence Stapleton has shown, Milton's conception of matter and his view of creation as having occurred *ex deo* rather than *ex nihilo* are two closely related and relatively complex illustrations of his thinking on time.. Both demonstrate his belief in God's creative activity in a stretch of time before the creation of the world. In Book III of Paradise Lost, Satan, disguised as a cherub, asks Uriel the whereabouts of earth. Uriel relates his own witness of the creation which, from his point of view, involves God imposing form on a pre-existent matter:

> I saw when at his Word the formless Mass,
> This world's material mould, came to a heap:
> Confusion heard his voice, and wild uproar
> Stood rul'd, stood vast infinitude confin'd. (III:708-711)

Uriel seems to answer the famous question of Job 38:4: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Yet Uriel knows that the scope of his witness is limited by his creaturely status: the causes of creation are "hid deep" in that part of God which is unknowable and unapproachable.The formless matter which Uriel saw transformed into an orderly universe could not have always existed independent of God. Milton says in the Christian Doctrine:

> matter must either have always existed, independently of God, or else originated from God at some point in time. That matter should have

> always existed independently of God is inconceivable. . . . There remains only this solution, especially if we allow ourselves to be guided by scripture, namely that all things came from God. (YP:307).

Again, Milton does not hesitate to use the phrase "at some point in time."

Milton's conception of matter is the basis of the strongly material quality of his account of the creation as well as his belief in the inherent virtue which exists in the created world even after the Fall. It is also the basis of his *ex deo* hypothesis of creation which, while not unprecedented in Christian thought, is not orthodox. Once again, Augustine defines the norm:

> You created heaven and earth but you did not make them . . .of your own substance. If you had done so, they would have been equal to your only-begotten Son, and therefore to yourself . . . . But besides yourself, O God, who are Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity, there was nothing from which you could make heaven and earth. Therefore you must have created them from nothing. (Confessions XII:7)

Augustine's *ex nihilo* view safeguards the coequal and coeternal status of the Trinity from the pantheistic implications of the *ex deo* hypothesis. Milton is not a pantheist. He believes, as Raphael tells Adam, that "All things proceed" from God and "up to him return" (V:470). The continuity between the material and the spiritual world unifies a graded, hierarchical cosmic structure in which material forms are "more refin'd, more spiritous" the closer they are to God.

Milton is not a trinitarian thinker either. The status he assigns to the Son is a final, important indication of his conception of time and history. Again, Raphael's description of the occasion of the Son's exaltation in heaven -- "on such day/As Heav'n's great Year brings forth" -- subordinates abstract definitions of time to the concreteness of the event itself. Rather than a Platonic great year marked by planetary conjunctions, the great year Raphael describes might be better thought of as a kind of liturgical year in heaven, that is, a sense of time defined by the awareness of a succession of significant, divine actions which intersect with the temporal duration which the angels themselves clearly experience.

When the Father anoints the Son he declares:

> This day have I begot whom I declare
> My only Son, and on this holy Hill
> Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
> At my right hand. (V:603-607)

The passage reflects Milton's rejection of a coeternal and coequal trinity, a view which has led critics to label him a follower of Arius, the fourth century cleric who developed a monotheistic creed in which God alone is eternal and the Son is a creature. Milton has been adequately defended against the pitfalls of the label by critics such as W.B. Hunter and C.A. Patrides, among others. Milton believes that the Son was begotten "within the bounds of time" before the creation of the world. As with the temporal implications of accommodation and typology, we need to recognize the correspondence between Milton's sense of earthly and heavenly time, and between pre-creation and post-Fall history. For Milton, God's purpose is fulfilled on earth as it is in heaven. Just as the Son is revealed at the right time in heaven, so too does he appear in the fullness of time at the center of earthly history:

> When the Son is said to be *the first born of every creature* and Rev. iii. 14, *the beginning of God's creation*, it is as plain as it could possibly be that God voluntarily created or generated or produced the Son before all things: the Son, who was endowed with divine nature and whom, similarly, when the time was ripe, God miraculously brought forth in his human nature from the Virgin Mary. (YP:211)

This passage fails to distinguish adequately between the terms "created" and "generated," and so allows room for comparison to Arius' view of the Son's creaturely status. But it also says clearly that the Son is "endowed with divine nature," a point which is crucial to the historic validity of the Incarnation. As Patrides has shown, strict Arianism denies the similarity of the Son to the Father and so denies the historic significance of the Incarnation as the entrance of the divine into time:

> Milton had plainly recognized, as did the early Christians before him, that Arius had in effect reduced Christianity from a historical religion to a pseudo-philosophical mythology. ("Milton and Arianism" 69).

The Christian Doctrine maintains the subordination of the Son to the Father while Paradise Lost is more equivocal, and for decades was read as an "orthodox" poem until the Christian Doctrine was discovered in 1825. Nevertheless, Milton's unorthodoxies do not make him a thorough-going Arian, for as Patrides has shown, strict Arianism contradicts one of Milton's fundamental views of time: that the Incarnation is an event equal in stature to the Creation and the Apocalypse.

So far we have explored Milton's conception of time drawing on evidence from the Christian Doctrine and Paradise Lost. In the Christian Doctrine, Milton establishes his opinions and beliefs with as much logic and evidence as he can summon. In Paradise Lost he portrays the manifestations of God's decrees, making us privy to the divine councils which concern human destiny. Let us now consider the implications of these conceptual ideas for Samson Agonistes, a tragic drama in which no heavenly councils are dramatized, in which the protagonist, God's champion, is distinguished by his singular lack of wisdom, in which knowledge of the ways of God to men is reached for in a darkness which is itself the symbol of the hero's alienation from, rather than separateness to, his creator. These concluding reflections will serve to preface the issues which will be explored in succeeding chapters.

As a tragedy, Samson Agonistes lacks the repertoire of conventions which allows Milton to portray the supernatural vantage point of eternity in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. The decree made at Samson's birth concerning his future role as the deliverer of Israel (Judges 14:5 says that Samson would *begin* to deliver Israel) invites comparison to the oracles which are prominent in Greek tragedy. But as Boethius shows, Fate is merely our misreading of Providence, and in any case the interpretation of the decree rests in human hands, for there is no change of venue between the temporal and the eternal as there is in the epics. Samson Agonistes, moreover, is an Old Testament story, and so decorum strips it of the wealth of classical allusion and simile which expand the dramas of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. The Chorus compares Samson to Atlas at one point, but the comparison is cryptic and foreign to the Hebrew outlook of these characters.

We know that, in the Christian Doctrine, Milton sought to base his ideas on "scrupulous fidelity" to biblical texts at the expense of traditional opinions. We also know that he aspired to base his poetic testament on a tradition which begins with the Old Testament prophets, leads to the work of his mentor or "original," Spenser, and so aligns his purpose of asserting eternal providence with the genuine prophetic impulse in both the Bible and English poetry. Areopagitica, which celebrates Spenser as a greater moral teacher than Scotus or Aquinas, and envisions England as potentially a nation of prophets, also presents the memorable image of England as a revived Samson, a "noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks" (Hughes, 744). We should therefore expect Samson Agonistes, because it is Milton's most confined treatment of an Old Testament subject, to reflect, in a more refined and concentrated form, his understanding of temporal patterns as they are derived from the Bible. Milton's reflections on these patterns are borne out in Samson Agonistes in at least five ways.

First, the most consistent emphasis Milton makes in his reflections on time in the Christian Doctrine is upon the absolute and perfect freedom of God's actions, and upon his absolute and perfect freedom to act. Since people are created in the image of God, the analogy of divine freedom in the human personality is free will with all the moral and ethical consequences free will entails. As we will discover, Samson unwisely takes his status as God's champion as a form of license which authorizes all of his actions. Acts which are rash, unwise, untimely, or better yet, intemperate. make free will an agent of disorder rather than order in the fallen world. Samson learns that strength without wisdom is inadequate. Wisdom implies the reunification of the human and the divine wills which is possible only when heroism is defined by the Miltonic ethic of patience.

Second, while Milton's non-trinitarian view of the relation between the Father and the Son has the effect of reserving the attribute of eternity for God alone, the view of time that results emphasizes an unfolding pattern divine actions. Milton's conception of time depends upon concrete events rather than abstract speculations. The exaltation of the Son, in the temporal continuum which precedes the creation, is one such event. The event not only defines time; in a very real sense it creates time. This view of time illuminates Milton's idea of permanence. If the acts of God are alone permanent then human actions independent of the will of God are illusory. This sense of permanence raises important questions about free will, responsibility, and the power of the individual to affect history. Milton's theology heavily favours the idea of grace as something the individual can neither earn nor achieve.

Third, part of what makes Milton's poetry genuinely prophetic is its way of promoting in us the awareness that history consists of the times in which God performs his actions. As readers, we are perhaps meant to identify with the Chorus in Samson Agonistes, not merely because they represent the public, as in Greek drama, but because they are a group of spectators somewhat aware of their own, limited perceptions as well as their total inability to control the course of events. In their interactions with Samson, the Chorus shares in the vicissitudes of hopeful expectation and pessimistic resignation, between an open and a closed future. As a communal, tribal, racial, and even familial entity, the Chorus represents generations of people who have confronted the issues of time in the drama.

Fourth, Samson Agonistes dramatizes the conflict between truth and error as a rivalry of assertions about time. In opposing the expected "Day of the Lord" to the established Day of Dagon, Milton develops the conflict of truth and error in terms of views of time that are based on revelation and superstition. He thus asserts that a conception of time is fundamental to the self-definition of a community. It is a part of its identity. As we will see names, and the moments or times in which names are conferred (as at Samson's nativity, or the establishment of the name "Israel") are integral to a community's time-consciousness and sense of destiny.

Finally, the importance of placing the tightly circumscribed time span of Samson Agonistes, and the destiny of Samson himself, in meaningful relation to the scheme of providential history which is circumscribed by the Creation, the Incarnation and the Apocalypse, leads to a consideration of what I will call Milton's "technique of adumbration." Throughout his canon, Milton portrays the translucence of the eternal in and through the temporal by linking specific moments of human action and meditation to the primary events of Creation, Incarnation and Apocalypse. Samson's sense of exile from the "prime decree" of light, his sense of his own messianic status, and the apocalyptic nature of the catastrophe, form the basis of these links in this poem. Milton thus adumbrates, in the aspects of redemption and typology, the relation between Samson's time and the time of providential history. The mutually supportive nature of both aspects of Samson's identity and experience shows that, for Milton, time is both the literal and the metaphoric "shadow" of eternity.

II: THE EXPERIENCE OF TIME

History consists of events, and providential history is time constituted as an order of divine actions which are creative and redemptive in nature. Whether it is measured in heaven or on earth, before or after the creation of the world, time depends on this pattern of "eternal" moments for its significance, especially when these moments effect release from the pattern of errant human actions. Raising good out of apparent evil is perhaps the most fundamental temporal pattern Milton describes. In this chapter, I will identify the particular experiential metaphors, images and categories of temporality through which this pattern is expressed in Samson Agonistes.

A most valuable definition of temporality resides in Paul Ricoeur's appraisal of the reciprocal relationship between time and narrative

> I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent. Their relationship is therefore reciprocal. ("Narrative Time" 169)

> The world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world. . . . time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of narrative; narrative,in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience. (Time and Narrative 1: 3)

Whether as narrative, under which heading Ricoeur emphasizes plot, the highest category in Aristotle's theory of tragedy, or as metaphor, since narrative and metaphor both, in their respective ways, create a "synthesis of the heterogeneous "or "a new congruence in the organization of events," (Time and Narrative 1: ix) language remains the tool with which we re-configure our temporal experience. In seventeenth century literature, for example, the prominent life metaphors of wayfaring and warfaring, which comprehend and focus the discordant nature of temporal experience, form the basis for any number of narratives and can be combined in any proportion. While the "rousing motions" that lead Samson into his future are experienced in relative silence, his earlier speeches represent journeys into his past, and are fraught with battles against his own near-despair.

One implication of this definition of temporality, an implication which is relevant to all of Milton's writings and which is necessary to any interpretation of Samson Agonistes, has to do with the value Milton places on human actions in time. As a product of human volition, speech itself is a form of action. Whether it is the speeches of Milton's characters, or Milton's own act of composing a poem, the value of the action depends entirely on its relation to the divine will. Milton reiterates this theme throughout Paradise Lost. The invocation which opens the poem is a clear illustration of this. So too are those other invocations which implore Urania, the sister of "Eternal Wisdom," to "govern" a poem which celebrates the "better fortitude" of patience. The poet and the poem, as well as the human characters within the drama, share with time itself a creaturely status which must anticipate its own formation and fulfilment. In Samson Agonistes, speech, in a number of instances, represents rash, impatient and intemperate action, while silence, as the closest possible analogy to the calm stasis of eternity, represents patience.

Patience is an attitude of mind which anticipates and even participates in divine actions without expecting to control their timing. The nature of the action which is anticipated in Samson Agonistes is perhaps best described as "deliverance." Deliverance describes the pre-eminent event in Old Testament historic consciousness, the exodus of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, without assimilating the definition to the typological framework of the New Testament. Nor does it discount that framework, for while the exodus is a literal, historical datum in Samson's memory, the Incarnation, read by Saint Paul as deliverance from the bondage of sin, is a focal point of the reader's retrospective view of history. The Exodus story precedes the captivity of the Danites by the Philistines, and is therefore a feature of their collective memory. At the same time, however, we, as readers, are aware that the fulfilment of the Gospel through the death and resurrection of Christ is carefully synchronized with Passover, the feast which commemorates the exodus from Egypt. The Exodus narrative also features the granting of the covenant of the law to Israel.

Samson Agonistes clearly tells the "passion" of Samson, takes place at noon and so is synchronized with the traditional hour of the crucifixion, and involves the relation between the law and the gospel which is the basis of Milton's idea of Christian liberty. Samson Agonistes takes place at a moment in history which reprises the captivity of the Israelites in Egypt and anticipates their future relapse into captivity in Babylon. It also carries the theme of cultural assimilation and genocide which are also present in Esther and in the story of Judas Maccabaeus. Samson is aware of his role as Israel's promised deliverer at a particular crisis in its history. He is also aware that his attempts to control the course of history have made a shambles of the promise. The poem thus explores the acute disparity between the divine and the human wills as they converge on the promised moment of deliverance. The tension between expectation and reality, explanation and experience, prophecy and memory produces within Samson a mental tension or dissonance which borders on despair.

Tragedy is a quintessentially religious genre in its origins in the Greek festivals and in Milton's adaptation of it. Anthony Low suggests that the experiential tensions which tragedy bears witness to are a consequence of its religious concerns:

> Tragedy examines life experientially, while religion imposes an explanation on it, yet certainly religion can be lived while tragedy too has its theoretical side. They ask, and sometimes answer, many of the same questions: the nature and purpose of the world; the nature of man and his relation to God, to the world, and to other men; the reason for suffering, evil, and death. (11)

The distinction Low makes is essential to the exploration of life in time which tragedy undertakes. On the one hand, the coherent, purposeful structure of time is affirmed in religious explanation. On the other, discord, isolation, and apparent chaos are the facts of tragic experience. The human experience of time, as it is affirmed in tragic writing, is neither one nor the other. It is the interaction between explanation and experience, or expectation and reality, where experience challenges and questions the very explanations which enlighten. The Book of Job, which influences both Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes, possesses this quality of tragedy. The demand for explanation, which is perhaps the essence of the human capacity for tragedy, is ingrained in the perceptions of Milton's Israelite characters: the interpretation of God's promise is that which forms their expectations.

The tension between expectation and reality forms a dialectical pattern which is recognizable throughout Milton's canon. In Surprised by Sin, Stanley Fish documents the pattern in Paradise Lost where it becomes the foundation of his theory of the reader's involvement in the poem. As an interpretation of Paradise Lost, Fish's theory offers a positive explanation of the "fractures" in the narrative perceived by A.J.A. Waldock (Paradise Lost and Its Critics, 1948), who assumes that discrepancies between expectation and reality are a sign of Milton's artistic failure as well as his inability to comprehend the ethical implications of his own work. When, for example, Adam's loyalties are divided between God and Eve at the moment of his fall, the reader's instinctive sympathy for Adam's decision to fall with Eve makes Milton's attempt to justify the ways of God to men seem, to critics such as Waldock, absurd. Fish's reply to Waldock's critically significant complaint succeeds by aligning this very real tension between what Adam does and what he is required to do with the historically puritan sense of the tensions which are inherent in fallen human consciousness. For the seventeenth century puritan, the inner life quite obviously consists of unrelenting spiritual warfare waged over the moral choices which Milton's poems embody. In the framework of Christian typology, spiritual warfare can be illustrated as a contest between the old and new "Adam" in every person:

> Fallen man is hopelessly corrupt and his corruption resists even the grace freely offered to him through the intercession of Jesus Christ. Man's soul becomes the scene of a battle between the carnality of the first Adam (the old, unregenerate man) and the righteousness of the second (the new, regenerate man); and in the seventeenth century the image of an intestine warfare that is simultaneously the sign of the Fall and the indication of the possibility of redemption is seen everywhere. (Surprised by Sin 39)

The tensions in Milton's poetry are not, as Waldock supposes, localized instances of artistic failure. They mirror the nature of the interior warfare they seek to express.

The dialectical tension between expectation and reality thus becomes an artistic strategy designed to attack the habitual responses of the old or carnal "Adam" and to educate and exercise the responses of a potentially regenerate Adam through a reiterated pattern of mistake, correction and instruction. Paradise Lost, arguably the most ambitious of poetic undertakings, is also, paradoxically, the poem which most impresses us with our own fallibilities and limitations. The latter feature, more even than the former, is the real crux of theodicy, for it makes both poet and reader dependent on the action of grace which is the underlying theme of the poem.

Since it is our most familiar and habitual assumption about the nature of time, ordinary, sequential chronology can be taken as one of the confining features of temporality incurred by the Fall. In Paradise Lost, Milton deploys the conventions of epic poetry in a way which gestures to possibilities beyond our ordinary experience:

> Milton cannot recreate the eternal moment, but by encouraging and then blocking the construction of sequential relationships he can lead the reader to accept the necessity of, and perhaps even apprehend, negatively, a time that is ultimately unavailable to him because of his limitations. (Surprised by Sin 35)

The epic narrator in Paradise Lost can counteract the rhetoric of Satan or voice nostalgia for the garden which is lost in time. The epic simile can create competing perspectives in time as well as in space, often juxtaposing the fallen and the unfallen world. The epic itself, beginning in medias res, breaks with ordinary chronology and orients time around particular events.

The same conventions are unavailable in Samson Agonistes because it is a dramatic poem. Similar techniques are present, however, in recognizable form. Often they are modified to intensify rather than alleviate our sense of the full burden of fallen time. By selecting an episode which begins in the last hours of Samson's life, Milton creates an analogy of the in medias res convention. Verbal retrospection is able to rehearse all of the previous episodes of Samson's career in any order. Had Milton gone ahead with his proposed dramas on "Samson Marrying" or "Samson at Rameth-Lechi," not all of the episodes of Samson's life would have been available to him.[1] Repetition of key episodes in memory allows for the disruption of normal chronology, for nothing requires Samson or the other characters to recollect his life in strict sequence. Just as the action of Paradise Lost must ultimately converge on the Fall, so too do Samson's recollections center on his succumbing to Dalila's entreaties and return to the present moment of his servitude.

In Paradise Lost, the narrator dramatizes his own prophetic undertaking by making the anticipated discovery of the form and meaning of his inspired work integral to a plot in which the spiritual integrity of mankind is historically lost and prophetically redeemed. The narrator's regeneration, and by extension the reader's, serves as the thematic analogy to God's creation of the universe. Hence in the invocation the poet prays that the sacrifice of his creative labour, made at the temple of the "upright heart and pure," will be acceptable to God. The creation of Paradise Lost, along with the reader's edification through it, are to be apprehended as unique aspects of the providential recreation of a fallen world which is the goal of history. God's ways to men are justified in and through a process of sojourning and discovery, guidance and inspiration, which amalgamates the moral, spiritual and aesthetic levels of the poem.

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[1] See "Milton's Outlines for Tragedy" in The Complete Prose Works of John Milton, Vol. VIII (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 539-585.

The epic form allows Milton to range through a poetic cosmos, celebrating the plenitude of Edenic time in the spatial correlatives of cosmic harmony and sacramental nature. Samson Agonistes, in contrast, is designed to deliberately intensify our experience of the constricted nature of fallen space and time. Here the spatial correlative of fallen time is the prison house where time is experienced as the dull round of slavish routine. It may even be taken as the physical dimensions of Samson's body, since his divine charisma has become a curse. The Chorus says to Samson:

> Thou art become (O worst imprisonment!)
> The Dungeon of thyself. (155-6)

While Michael anoints Adam's eyes in preparation for his vision of history, Samson's blindness is unrelieved:

> O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
> Irrecoverably dark, total Eclipse
> Without all hope of day! (80-82)

While Samson eventually sees with "inward eyes illuminated," we are distanced from the catastrophe which takes place off stage in accordance with Aristotle's prohibition of spectacle. Milton adheres to this prohibition in order to remind us that we, like the messenger who reports the catastrophe, and like the Chorus, are not delivered from time but remain in a temporal framework which positions us between a past of memory and a future of expectation. In the same way, as Adam descends from the mountain of vision at the end of Paradise Lost and makes his way into the fallen world, the poem concludes by returning its readers to their own historic moments.

In spite of its excursions into memory and its consciousness of prophecy, the action of Samson Agonistes closely corresponds to the time it takes to read the poem, which is the time of ordinary sequential chronology. The restricted physical setting is analogous to the confining nature of fallen time. No eternal vantage points, such as the heavenly councils which take place in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained are dramatized to relieve these restrictions. And yet, Samson Agonistes is a unique expression of the same reality which Paradise Lost, in all its capacity and variety, expresses.

In order to recognize this, we must first remember that Samson Agonistes is, as Aristotle would say, an imitation of an action. The divisions within Samson's mind imitate, in a magnified and intensified form, similar divisions which can be assumed to exist within the mind of the reader. The condition of the "split reader," which Fish identifies in his exploration of Paradise Lost, is also pertinent to Samson Agonistes. Fish's "split reader" is "one who is continually responding to two distinct sets of stimuli - - the experience of individual poetic moments and the ever present pressure of the Christian doctrine -- and who attaches these responses to warring forces within him, and is thus simultaneously the location and the observer of their struggle" (Surprised by Sin 42). In the private, interior nature of Samson's tortured prologue, we, as readers, paradoxically share in the isolation which determines our sense of individuality after the Fall. Our identification with and separateness from Samson, an attraction and repulsion which are mirrored in the role of the Chorus, add a further dimension to the dialectical tension which is developed throughout the poem.

In Towards Samson Agonistes, Mary-Ann Radzinowicz develops Fish's contention that the tensions within the poem are designed to undermine the conditioned responses and habitual assumptions of the reader:

> Not all major works of art affirm, celebrate, reassure or conserve. Some not only use and imitate dialectic but, for educative purposes, actually enter themselves into a disturbing dialectic, shake the preconceptions of the reader, and induce a change of mind. Those revolutionizing works make demands upon the reader, challenge him, and seek to transform him. The experience is often disagreeable.(5)

Radzinowicz believes that the tension between expectation and reality in Samson's experience mirrors a similar tension in Milton's political career. In fact, the tensions which are developed in Samson Agonistes are present in the Book of Judges. While the presence of these tensions may, from a biographical point of view, explain Milton's attraction to the Samson story in the first place, it is certain that Samson Agonistes is faithful to its source in elaborating these tensions. Before proceeding with a close analysis of the prologue, I would like to examine the similar dialectical tensions which Samson Agonistes and the Judges narrative hold in common. As well, I would like to demonstrate that these tensions are a feature of much of Milton's poetry: they are a basic feature of the "Nativity Ode," written when Milton was just twenty-one years of age.

In The Art of Biblical Narrative, Robert Alter recognizes two parallel tensions which are distinguished to varying degrees of emphasis in most biblical narratives:

> One is a tension between the divine plan and the disorderly character of actual historical events, or, to translate this proposition into specifically biblical terms, between the divine promise and its ostensible failure to be fulfilled; the other is a tension between God's will, His providential guidance, and human freedom, the refractory nature of man. . . . the depth with which human nature is imagined in the Bible is a function of its being conceived as caught in the powerful interplay of this double dialectic between design and disorder, providence and freedom. (33)

The emphasis placed on this dialectical tension reflects the preoccupation of biblical narrative with the course of providential history:

> The God of Israel, as has been observed, is above all the God of history: the working out of His purposes in history is a process that compels the attention of the Hebrew imagination, which is thus led to the most vital interest in the concrete and differential character of historical events. (32)

The tension between human freedom and providence complicates and even obstructs the working out of God's plan in history. The program for Adam's improvement through "tract of time," as outlined by Raphael in Paradise Lost, is disrupted by the Fall. The sense of license Samson assumes from his status as God's champion leads to a series of exploits which are not necessarily in harmony with God's plan. Yet God's ultimate goal of redemption is incontrovertible.

Arranging biblical narratives in a spectrum between the poles of design and disorder, Alter places Judges, along with Samuel and Kings, at the disorderly end.

These books, he contends, present characters who struggle "to reconcile their knowledge of the divine promise with their awareness of what is actually happening in history" (33-34). Samuel was, in fact, the last "judge" of Israel as well as a vital instrument in the foundation of the monarchy. Milton refers proleptically to I Samuel in Samson Agonistes by making the fictitious Harapha the ancestor of Goliath, the Philistine giant whom David killed with his sling. If the reference reminds us of the victory of another of God's champions, it also reminds us that the war against the Philistines did not end with Samson's death, but was long and protracted.

The emphasis on a "disorderly" history in Judges reflects its concern with Israel's failure to remain faithful in its covenant with God. As Peter Craigie puts it:

> The historical subject matter of the book describes several generations of social and religious chaos, mitigated only occasionally by the emergence of a judge who brought deliverance to the hard-pressed people. The setting of chaos, relieved only occasionally by order, is given religious meaning: Chaos was a natural outcome of Israel's failure to maintain the integrity of faith, but order was restored when the people were led back, by a judge, to their true commitment to God. (134)

Apart from its acknowledgment of the successive defections of the people who forget the covenant and follow after strange gods, the book also conveys, as Gerhard Von Rad has argued, a clearly pessimistic conception of charismatic leadership. The potentially unifying and stabilizing figure of the leader invariably falls into the chaos that results when the covenant is broken. "Behind these narratives," Von Rad concludes, " lies, it would seem, the unspoken question, where is the one who serves his people as deliverer not merely on one occasion only?" (Old Testament Theology 1: 329). The answer anticipated from the Old Testament perspective is David. From the New Testament perspective it is Christ.

Judges ends on an extremely bleak note which conveys perhaps a hint of hopeful expectation: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (21:25). The ending leaves us poised between two high points in Israel's history which are idealized because of the divine favor and success enjoyed by the leaders of these periods, Joshua and David. Milton leaves us in a similar position at the end of his major poems, each of which ends by subordinating an apocalyptic vision or image to the continuation of a journey through a history of indefinite length. Milton thus synchronizes the condition of his central characters with the position of his readers as he reorients them in the unique historic period in which the poems are read.

The position of Adam between Books XI and XII of Paradise Lost presents the analogous position of the reader in its widest perspective. After his account of the flood, Michael pauses "Betwixt the world destroy'd and world restor'd" (XII:3). The flood is a portent of the dissolution and recreation of the world, and so corresponds to our own perpetual position between the creation and the apocalypse. This is in turn analogous to our position between a nostalgic past and a hoped-for future in the Book of Judges. Still another correspondence is that of Samson as he exists between the memory of his former, idealized self and the expectation of his restored, inspired self. Any suspension in time between two divine actions, of whatever magnitude, corresponds to this paradigm of temporal experience. At the end of his epics, Milton reprises the theme of sojourning with which the poems begin, knowing that the reader's life in time is always "in the middest."[2]

Radzinowicz argues that the sense of dissonance between expectation and reality is a reflection of the defeat of Milton's political expectations. I have no doubt that his political disappointments strongly influenced his choice and treatment of subject matter in his major poems. We need to recognize, however, that this dissonance is a consistent feature in the canon, and is probably attributable to his recognition of the same dissonance in biblical texts, especially those that influenced his own sense of prophetic mission. Thus the tension between expectation and reality is just as acute in the "Nativity Ode," written when Milton was only twenty-one. Perhaps this is because Milton was engaged in the personal rather than public struggle of a choice of career. If so, the ode seals his choice in the image of "hallow'd fire" which purified the lips of Isaiah and links Milton's sense of poetic vocation and inspiration with the line of Hebrew prophets.

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[2] The expression is from Spenser's Letter to Raleigh: "For the method of a Poet historical is not such, as of an Historiographer. For an Historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were done, accounting as well the times as the actions, but a Poet thrusteth into the middest, even where it most concerneth him, and there recoursing to the thinges forepaste, and divining of thinges to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all." (Spenser: Poetical Works 407).

Arthur Barker's reading of the ode emphasizes its musical quality. He resolves the poem structural units based on patterns of imagery. In his view, the Hymn consists of three equal movements of eight stanzas each followed by the image of the Nativity in the final stanza. Each movement presents a "single modification of the simple contrast, preserved throughout the poem, between images suggesting light and harmony and images of gloom and discord" (49). The celestial choir envisioned in the poem therefore occupies the central movement where it serves as a symbol of harmony which "enables the poet to draw on a vast reservoir of pagan and Christian suggestion while transcending the conflict between the two traditions" (53).

Barker's reading establishes the centrality of light and harmony which betoken the reconciliation between God and people which the Nativity announces. I take exception, however, to the notion that the ode "transcends" the conflict between pagan and Christian traditions. To transcend this conflict would be to reduce the essential paradox of the Incarnation, of which the Nativity is but one aspect. For Milton, the Incarnation brings both peace and a sword, a paradox the ode holds in balance even as it explores it. Concord and discord are both aspects of the Incarnation.

At the Incarnation, eternity intervenes in the dimension of time which it circumscribes, as it does even in the few short hours of Samson Agonistes. Time is arrested into a stasis analogous to eternity by the Nativity, but history will resume its narrative of discord, strife and war. Nevertheless, the course of time, which is bounded by the Creation and Apocalypse, is defined by the Incarnation which redeems it. Notice, for example, how Milton characteristically identifies, as we have already seen him do in passages from Paradise Lost, different aspects of the Incarnation with phases of universal history. In stanza XII, the Nativity is linked to the original harmony of Creation:

> Such Music (as 'tis said)
> Before was never made,
>   But when of old the sons of morning sung,
> While the Creator Great
> His constellations set,
>   And the well-balanc't world on hinges hung. (117-122)

This is an image of concord, but the Nativity is also identified with the discord of the Fall, for Christ is divided from "the Courts of everlasting Day" as he descends into a "darksome House of mortal Clay" (13-14). Ultimately it is the discord of the "bitter cross," more even than the concord of the Nativity, which works our "perpetual peace."

Realization of the necessary, discordant aspects of Christ's mission undermines the expectations of an easy return to bliss aroused by the harmony and peace of the Nativity. Milton dramatizes the awakening of God's two creatures, nature and humankind, to this realization by exploring the tension between their expectations and reality. Nature is personified in order that she might be lulled into false expectation of "future bliss" which avoids the upheaval of the Apocalypse:

> Nature that heard such sound
> Beneath the hollow round
>   Of Cynthia's seat, the Airy region thrilling,
> Now was almost won
> To think her part was done,
>   And that her reign had here its last fulfilling. (101-106)

Man also lulls himself into false expectations which do not reckon on the bitter cross:

> For if such holy Song
> Enwrap our fancy long,
>   Time will run back, and fetch the age of gold,
> And speckl'd vanity
> Will sicken soon and die,

> And leprous sin will melt from earthly mold,
> And Hell itself will pass away,
> And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day. (133-140)

Human fancy expects Heaven to "open wide the Gates of her high Palace-Hall." But "wisest Fate" interjects and asserts the hard destiny of the smiling infant. When human expectation is overturned by this reality, the ode pursues the theme it shares with Samson Agonistes: the destruction of pagan idols.

Music and noise symbolize the varying degrees of concord and discord between the human and the divine, as well as the different manifestations of providence, throughout Milton's poetry. "The Passion," a failed attempt to write a companion piece to the "Nativity Ode," resumes the harmony of Christmas before shifting to notes of woe:

> For now to sorrow must I tune my song,
> And set my Harp to notes of saddest woe,
> Which on our dearest Lord did seize ere long,
> Dangers, and snares, and wrongs, and worse than so,
> Which he for us did freely undergo. (8-12)

The passage makes an interesting anticipation of the invocation to Book IX of Paradise Lost, where the narrator complains that he must change "Those Notes to Tragic." Again, it is the compulsion or necessity engendered by the Fall which reverses an anticipated course of events.

"At a Solemn Music" portrays a human choir responding to heavenly music in a symbolic reconciliation of the human and the divine:

> we on Earth with undiscording voice
> May rightly answer that melodious noise;
> As once we did, till disproportion'd sin
> Jarr'd against nature's chime, and with harsh din
> Broke the fair music that all creatures made
> To their great Lord, whose love their motion sway'd
> In perfect diapason . . . (17-23)

Music represents the order and harmony perfected by God in the original creation when, as Job says, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (38:7). While noise or discord represents the division between God and humanity caused by the Fall, it can in turn, once humanity has conditioned itself to a fallen existence, represent God's disruption of human patterns. This is an important clue to the relationship between Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes. At the end of Paradise Regained, the victorious Son is ministered to by "Angelic Choirs" singing "Heavenly Anthems of his victory/ Over temptation and the Tempter proud"(IV:594-5). In Samson Agonistes, Samson is escorted to the pagan temple by musicians playing "Pipes and Timbrels." As well, the messenger tells us, the "morning Trumpets Festival proclaimed"(1598). When Samson appears in the temple, the Philistine audience "with a shout/ Rifted the Air clamoring thir god with praise"(1620-1). Samson soon destroys the festival in a convulsion of noise:

> Manoa: I know your friendly minds and -- O what noise!
> Mercy of Heav'n! what hideous noise was that?
> Horribly loud, unlike the former shout.
>
> Chorus: Noise call you it or universal groan
> As if the whole inhabitation perish'd?

The noise interrupts Manoa in mid-sentence. His speech concerned his attempts to ransom his son from the Philistines, a plan he has been busy with all through the drama. The interruption of his sentence therefore dramatizes the reversal of human expectation by divine action. This is, of course, even more true for the Philistines. If the Son's victory in Paradise Regained secures the permanent, eventual restoration of humanity to its original condition, Samson Agonistes portrays a specific, localized expression of revolutionary energy which temporarily defeats idols, rituals, and practices which degrade the human image. We can now proceed to examine the way in which Milton expresses these characteristic tensions in his poetry in Samson's prologue.

As Radzinowicz suggests, the prologue imitates the movement of mind in crisis. Samson is tormented by restless, uncontrollable thoughts which present "Times past, what once I was, and what am now"(22). The divisions within his mind are projected in his perception of two different Samsons: his former, idealized self who roamed the countryside wreaking havoc on the Philistines and his present self enslaved by his enemies. His meditation on the divine promise of deliverance offers a compressed outline of the temporal dynamics which inform the poem as a whole:

> Promise was that I
> Should *Israel* from *Philistian* yoke deliver;
> Ask for this great Deliverer now, and find him
> Eyeless in *Gaza* at the Mill with slaves,
> Himself in bonds under Philistian yoke. (38-42)

The shifting verb tenses convey his disorientation in time. The past tense "was" appears to annul the nativity covenant which conferred upon him his status as God's champion. The auxiliary "Should" presents the expected, now imaginary direction of past events, and also conveys a note of personal responsibility for the actual outcome. The present tense verbs "ask" and "find" make for a sudden convergence on the present moment of Samson's humiliation, defeat and servitude.

Samson's use of the third person "him" is also revealing of his inner state. The pronoun establishes his alienation by objectifying the idealized, former self, the self who should have fulfilled the promise. The split between these two Samsons is a particular instance of the duality which is a feature of fallen consciousness in general. Adam's sense of a former self is one of the first consequences of his fall. Samson's prologue is in many respects an extension of Adam's contemplation of his fallen state. Like Samson, Adam is prone on the ground in darkness:

> Thus Adam to himself lamented loud
> Through the still Night, not now, as ere man fell,
> Wholesome and cool and mild, but with black Air
> Accompanied, with damps and dreadful gloom,
> Which to his evil Conscience represented
> All things with double terror: On the ground
> Outstretcht he lay, on the cold ground, and oft
> Curs'd his Creation, Death as oft accus'd
> Of tardy execution, since denounc't
> The day of his offence. Why comes not Death,
> With one thrice acceptable stroke
> To end me? (X:845-856)

For both Adam and Samson, the contemplation of suicide proceeds from "humours black." Oblivion appears as the only solution to fallen duality. Samson even perceives death as a kind of community when he predicts, ironically, that he will "shortly be with them that rest"(598).

The divisions which resonate throughout the entire poem are initiated in the very first line: "A little onward lend thy guiding hand." The line establishes a mysterious, second presence which engages Samson, and the reader, in the patterns of dialogue and dialectic, isolation and relationship, which govern the poem. The line is deliberately ambiguous. To whom is Samson talking? If he is appealing to some human figure for help, a friend or perhaps a prison guard, then the appeal intensifies his state of bondage as well as the dependency caused by his blindness. If, on the other hand, the line is a prayer, then it illustrates the dependency on providence for which Samson was formed, a dependency he learns at considerable personal cost.

Samson goes on to describe the object of his journey:

> For yonder bank hath choice of Sun or shade
> There I am wont to sit, when any chance
> Relieves me from my task of servile toil,
> Daily in the common Prison else enjoin'd me. (3-6)

Even his sense of his destination develops the double presence of the first line. From the standpoint of his bondage to the Philistines, Samson is clearly accustomed to his destination. His noon hour rest is part of a set, habitual pattern which defines the routine of slavery. At the same time, from the standpoint of prayer, Milton is clearly evoking the twenty-third psalm in "yonder bank":

> The Lord is my shepherd; I shall
> not want.
> He maketh me to lie down in
> green pastures: he leadeth me beside
> the still waters.

As I will point out in another chapter, Milton draws upon the psalms in order to convey the Israelite sense of covenantal history and community. Even the balance of the twenty-third psalm pertains to Samson, for he is both in the shadow of death and in the presence of his enemies. He does not enjoy the peace of mind which is traditionally associated with this psalm. Yet the evocation contains the promised end of "calm of mind, all passion spent," and in this way illuminates the overall design of the poem and, in turn, the way in which the design illustrates Milton's sense of providential movement in time. Just as the end of the poem is anticipated in the psalmic allusion, so too is Samson's role as Israel's deliverer contained in the annunciation of his birth, an annunciation he continually returns to in memory.

The pastoral guidance of the twenty-third psalm becomes an alternative to the mundane options for the second presence registered in the first line. The ambiguity is maintained and not resolved, however. The competing interpretations implied by the divine and the human, the eternal and the temporal, are focused in Samson's "choice of sun or shade." The drama unfolds on two distinct but interacting levels, one temporal and the other eternal. Critics have generally recognized these two levels in the theme of ransom which develops in the poem. Manoa's efforts to negotiate the release of his son from captivity, even if it means giving all of his worldly goods to the Philistines, functions as the temporal analogy of God's concern for Samson and His final reclamation of him as His chosen champion. Manoa's bustling, frenetic, optimistic movements contrast with the calm imperturbability of the hidden deity who contemplates the motions of His grace in their foreordained moment. The analogy of providential concern in Manoa's role illustrates the two levels on which the drama proceeds. As a thread of plot, however, it is really only one part of a complex design of "doubleness" which the poem elaborates and which reinforces the tension between the eternal and the temporal orders of action.

In her study of the role of the Chorus , Kathleen Swaim summarizes the patterns of doubleness which are apparent in the poem. She cites the double annunciation of Samson's birth, Samson's betrayal by two women, the two entries of the Philistine Officer who summons Samson to the temple, the "bi-form" nature of Dagon who is half man and half fish, and the two shouts which are audible from the pagan festival "off stage" (225). As Swaim suggests, we are required to gain perspective on "the various doublenesses operating throughout Samson Agonistes, particularly the junctures of metaphorical and metaphysical, poetic and spiritual, verbal and transcendent, pagan and Christian, experiential and faith-full" (240).

If "that sort of Dramatic poem which is call'd tragic" is designed to clarify the limitations and weaknesses of our human vantage point, then the doubling of the plot in Samson Agonistes requires us to consider the certainty with which we can say that the human actions in the drama coincide with divine will. We are aware of God's purpose as it is revealed to us and to Adam by Raphael in Paradise Lost. We are aware that God freely ventures the Son's integrity in a contest with Satan in Paradise Regained. As I have stated before, however, Samson Agonistes has no inspired narrator and dramatizes no eternal councils or divine decrees (the visitation of the angel who announces Samson's birth is a distant memory transmitted through human witnesses, and is limited to the human perspective). The nature of the relationship between the moment of grace Samson experiences and his decision to proceed to the temple, and especially the destructive action which he takes there, is not certain and can by no means be taken for granted. It is a focal point for the tensions, ambiguities, and patterns of doubleness which inform the entire poem, and has provided a point of controversy and division for a generation of Miltonists.[3]

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[3] John Carey sees the poem as a study in outmoded heroism which Milton instructs us to reject (Milton 138-146).. Irene Samuel sees the poem as a genuine tragedy of blind and misguided action ("Samson Agonistes as Tragedy" 235-257). Joseph Wittreich argues that the poem functions as a "warning prophecy" which shows a false apocalypse as opposed to the true apocalypse revealed by Christ. (Visionary Poetics 207).. Wittreich's Interpreting Samson Agonistes begins with a polemical survey of critical positions surrounding the poem..

In pursuing this issue we must remember that eternity and time exist in a hierarchical relationship in which the eternal order is free and independent and the temporal order is contingent and dependent. Does the presence of providential concern, which inspires in Samson the motions of grace at a discernible moment in the drama, bind the other events of the poem together in any kind of logical or discernible relationship? This question leads directly into the famous problem, first posed by Dr. Johnson, of the apparent lack of a middle in the drama, a middle being a series of related events which advance the action to the catastrophe along clear, causal lines. Critics who seek to defend the poem against Johnson's charge generally propose Samson's inward regeneration as the middle with each of the three middle interviews catalyzing Samson's recovery to a higher threshold of virtue.[4] From the standpoint of Milton's theology, as opposed to his handling of tragic form which Johnson's criticism primarily addresses, faith is described in the Christian Doctrine as "an instrumental and contributory cause of the process of sanctification" (YP:465). Samson does indeed demonstrate faith at critical moments, as, for example, when he predicts that God "will arise, and his great name assert" at the expense of Dagon (467). Yet regeneration is ultimately a free and creative act of God. In his discussion of predestination, Milton argues that if the Fall were in any way necessary or inevitable because of God's foreknowledge of it, then redemption would be a matter of justice (YP:174). Since the Fall originated in human free will, however, redemption is a matter of grace. Milton's use of the word "cause" in his discussion of sanctification, which is synonymous with regeneration in the Christian Doctrine, does not mean that God reacts to the forces which act upon Samson in the middle episodes. If grace, as Milton conceives it, comes freely, unearned, and even unsought, then its appearance cannot be enmeshed in any causal network of episodes.

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[4] The position is very widely distributed in criticism. Critics who recognize themes of rebirth, revival and renewal in the drama should be distinguished, however, from critics who propose regeneration, with its progressive stages of confession contrition, conversion and departure, as revealing the structure of Milton's plot. For a partial survey of critics who present the latter view see Low, p. 8.

Stanley Fish contends that Samson Agonistes is designed to frustrate our natural inclination to find a logical relation between the eternal and temporal plots even as it encourages us to seek for one ("Question and Answer" 209-245). A consequence of this position is that the motions Samson experiences represent a moment of insight or illumination afforded by the action of grace; they are not the logical or even foreseeable outcome of a chain of events. These particular moments of illumination are part of a constellation of insights which create analogies between the individual's experience of time and the primary events of Creation, Incarnation and Apocalypse, events which form the foundation of Milton's theological conception of time. As readers, we possess this wider conceptual vantage point in its basic outline along with a knowledge of the Samson story and hence the outcome of Samson's ordeal. This knowledge, however, should not lead us to assume that we immediately know the relationship between the poem's two plots. While the relationship may ultimately be recognized, it is, as Fish suggests, of a complexity which should not be reduced by our expectations. Milton's tragic poem weighs the enigma of the human personality as it succumbs, even without apparent motive, to sin and error, and considers the equally enigmatic movement of providence as it redeems the human personality from its protracted pattern of error. Yet Samson Agonistes is strictly limited to the human vantage point. As a result, as Fish maintains,. "while the reader has a sense of observing and participating in a continuing process, the mechanics of that process remain hidden from him" ("Question and Answer" 225).

These observations are based upon the conflict between expectation and reality as it is worked out in this particular poem. Although we already know the outcome of the story from our knowledge of Judges, Milton clearly expects us to enter into this basic condition of temporal experience by identifying our own isolation with that of

Samson and our own well-intentioned fallibility with that of the Chorus. For the Israelite characters in the poem, the variability of circumstances and the violation of their own expectations call into question the constancy and benevolence of God. Hence the Chorus exclaims:

> God of our Fathers, what is man!
> That thou towards him with hand so various,
> Or might I say contrarious,
> Temper'st thy providence through his short course,
> Not evenly, as thou rul'st
> Th'Angelic orders and inferior creatures mute,
> Irrational and brute. Nor do I name of men the common rout,
> That wand'ring loose about
> Grow up and perish, as the summer fly,
> Heads without name no more remember'd,
> But such as thou hast solemnly elected,
> With gifts and graces eminently adorn'd
> To some great work, thy glory,
> And people's safety, which in part they effect:
> Yet toward these, thus dignifi'd, thou oft,
> Amidst thir height of noon,
> Changest thy count'nance and thy hand, with no regard
> Of highest favors past
> From thee on them, or them to thee of service. (667-686)

With their understanding of their own, unique election as God's chosen nation, as well as Samson's special election as God's champion, the Chorus infers that the trauma of change in some way, and in some cases, inheres the nature of providence.

Likewise Manoa, who never expected to become a father in his old age, discovers that his blessing is perhaps a curse:

> what thing good
> Pray'd for, but often proves our woe, our bane?
> I pray'd for Children, and thought barrenness
> In wedlock a reproach; I gain'd a Son,
> And such a Son as all Men hail'd me happy;
> Who would be now a Father in my stead?
> O wherefore did God grant me my request,
> And as a blessing with such pomp adorn'd?
> Why are his gifts desirable, to tempt
> Our earnest Prayers, then, giv'n with solemn hand
> As Graces, draw a Scorpion's tail behind?
> For this did th'Angel twice descend? for this
> Ordain'd thy nurture holy, as of a Plant? (350-362).

While this speech gives vent to frustrations which do not perhaps reflect Manoa's essential piety and beliefs, his perception of a fickle and perhaps even treacherous God, projected by his own wavering in a unique but transient moment of emotion, illustrates Fish's point that the complexity of temporal experience cannot be reduced by "the organizing power of discursive reasoning' ("Question and Answer" 219).

Both Manoa and the Chorus abate rather than resolve their frustrations and doubts with reassurances of the justice of providence. Manoa cautions Samson to "Tax not divine disposal." The Chorus maintains:

> Just are the ways of God,
> And justifiable to Men;
> Unless there be who think not God at all:
> If any be, they walk obscure;
> For of such Doctrine never was there School,
> But the heart of the Fool,
> And no man Doctor therein but himself. (294-299)

For Samson, however, the clearest explanation of experience lies in the choices he has made. His acceptance of personal responsibility for his downfall is expressed consistently, and becomes in itself a form of constancy which begins to mirror the steadfastness of providence as it, in turn, maintains its responsibility for an errant individual. With some of the formality of a liturgical confession, Samson states:

> Father, I do acknowledge and confess
> That I this honor, I this pomp have brought
> To Dagon, and advanc'd his praises high
> Among the Heathen round; to God have brought
> Dishonor, obloquy, and op't the mouths
> Of Idolists, and Atheists; have brought scandal
> To Israel, diffidence of God, and doubt
> In feeble hearts, propense enough before
> To waver, or fall off and join with Idols:
> Which is my chief affliction, shame and sorrow,
> The anguish of my Soul, that suffers not
> Mine eye to harbor sleep, or thoughts to rest. (448-459)

When he threatens Dalila and challenges Harapha, however, he shows that he is still quite willing to act rashly and errantly on his own impulse.

The focal point of dissonance in Samson's experience is certainly the moment when he succumbed to Dalila's entreaties. By divulging the secret of his strength, he violated the "mystery of God given me under pledge/ Of vow," and fell into the hands of his enemies. As Samson recounts his failure in detail in lines 376-411, we are impressed by how unnecessary his failure was. As Fish observes: "What is remarkable about this passage is the disparity between its direction and its conclusion. Everything seems to point *away from* Samson's yielding" ("Question and Answer" 213). He admits that he was not surprised but "warn'd by oft experience." Moreover, he sees into her purpose even before he surrenders:

> Thrice I deluded her, and turn'd to sport
> Her importunity, each time perceiving
> How openly, and with what impudence
> She purpos'd to betray me (396-399)

Finally he succumbs to a series of assaults which are all verbal in nature:

> Yet the fourth time, when must'ring all her wiles,
> With blandisht parleys, feminine assaults,
> Tongue batteries, she surceas'd not day nor night
> To storm me overwatch't, and wearied out.
> At times when men seek most repose and rest.
> I yielded, and unlock'd her all my heart. (402-407)

Before recounting the episode, Samson again affirms that responsibility rests in his own free will. He declares that he is the "Sole Author" of his misfortune. The diction of the passage clearly resonates with God's anticipation of the fall of Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost: "They trespass, Authors to themselves in all" (III:122). Adam is subsequently strengthened against temptation by the visit of Raphael. Adam in turn strengthens Eve when they separate before her encounter with the serpent. He also recognizes the disastrous consequences of her fallen condition when she returns. When Adam falls, however, Milton writes:

> he scrupl'd not to eat
> Against his better knowledge, not deceiv'd,
> But fondly overcome with Female charm.(IX:997-999).

Here again we reach the focal point of Waldock's criticism of Paradise Lost. The polarization of Adam's loyalties between God and Eve, with the reader's sympathies inclining, quite naturally and understandably, towards Eve and away from God, damages the moral and ethical purpose of theodicy which the poem outlines for itself. Samson's loyalties were perhaps similarly divided when he gave in to Dalila. Although he is a creature born after the Fall, his failure is equally thoughtless given his awareness of his special relationship with his creator. His failure may even derive from a complacent acceptance and superficial understanding of a divine *charisma* and commission which engender *hubris*, a false and typically fallen assumption of a godlike status. Unlike Adam and Eve, Samson is already imperfect before his downfall. Yet the divisions and dualities which Waldock exposes in the action of Paradise Lost represent a potential imperfection which is only actualized by the Fall itself. As long as Adam remains unfallen he represents a vital intercessory link between God and the fallen Eve. But the potential narrative of Adam's intercession loses its future when Adam falls, and the Son enters history on behalf of the whole of humanity. Our sympathetic inclinations with Adam towards the fallen Eve are not only validated by Adam's decision: they are also, from the retrospective standpoint of the fallen psychology Milton explores, strengthened within us by his Fall. The division which is the very source of our polarized sympathies becomes the distinguishing feature of temporality as it exists after the Fall, a temporality which mirrors our own fallen nature because it is formed by it.

The complex patterns of doubleness which inform Samson Agonistes should therefore serve to deepen our awareness of the nature of temporality as it is conditioned by the Fall. Given that Samson's fall was a fall from silence into speech, since he surrendered his "fort of silence" to Dalila's "Tongue batteries," we can begin to consider the relation between temporality and narrativity, or time and language, suggested by Ricoeur. A number of critics have given careful attention to the role of language in the poem.[5] Silence is a dimension of the role of language, for silence is the condition of Samson's covenant with God. He falls by breaking his "seal of silence" under Dalila's entreaties. Blindness and slavery are the greatest misfortunes that ensue, but Samson also dwells on punishments that are verbal in nature. His fall is said to have "op'd the mouths" of idolaters. He is "avoided as a blab." He imagines himself the subject of gossip:

> Tell me, Friends,
> Am I not sung and proverb'd for a Fool
> In every street; do they not say, "How well
> Are come upon him his deserts?" (202-205)

Samson's preoccupation with verbal injury illustrates his acute consciousness of his own image. On the one hand, this consciousness points out that Samson's near-despair does have a strongly egocentric quality to it: his private agony is compounded by his sense of public reputation. Yet it is really Samson who verbalizes his own torments. His articulation of his public image is a feature of the "double image" which manifests the divisions within his mind. The most essential point of doubleness in the drama then, the one which serves as the thematic centre for all others, is that of the two Samsons: Samson as he once was, free to serve God as God, Samson assumes, might have wished, and Samson as he is now, enslaved by "Idolists and Atheists." The two Samsons comprehend the eternal and temporal orders of plot since the former Samson is allied with God while he maintains his "holy secret." The latter has severed his relationship with God by violating the pledge of silence.

An implication of the relation between speech and silence is, as Marcia Landy observes, that "words seem to signify the temporal world inhabited by the suffering Samson and by Manoa, Dalila and Harapha. Samson passes through and then beyond the limits of speech into the final noise and then into silence" (176). Manoa's attempts to ransom his son from the Philistines hinge on the verbal skills necessary for diplomatic negotiation. Dalila persuades Samson to sympathize with the circumstances which led her to betray him. Harapha engages Samson in "flyting," an intense but pointless verbal taunting match which, in this case, does not lead to armed combat. Each figure affords Samson a mirror image of what he was and what he is. Each composes a verbal image or "temptation" which offers a solution to Samson's present problems, on the temporal rather than the eternal level only, through the recovery of some part of Samson's past. Manoa hopes for what amounts to a second childhood for Samson, a retirement which frees him from further involvement in the fate of his nation:

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[5] See Marcia Landy's "Language and the Seal of Silence in Samson Agonistes," Milton Studies, 2 (1970), 175-194, and Kathleen Swaim's "The Doubling of the Chorus in Samson Agonistes," Milton Studies, 20 (1984), 225-245.

> It shall be my delight to tend his eyes,
> And view him sitting in the house, ennobl'd
> With all those high exploits by him achiev'd,
> And on those shoulders waving down those locks,
> That of a Nation arm'd the strength contain'd. (1490-1494)

Dalila offers a return to an unhappy marriage in which the consolations are sensual and not spiritual:

> I to the Lords will intercede, not doubting
> Thir favorable ear, that I may fetch thee
> From forth this loathsome prison-house to abide
> With me, where my redoubl'd love and care
> With nursing diligence, to me glad office,
> May ever tend about thee to old age
> With all things grateful cheer'd, and so supplied,
> That what by me thou hast lost thou least shall miss. (920-926)

Harapha, the "tongue doughty" giant, offers Samson the chance to confirm his own legend:

> Much have I heard
> Of thy prodigious might and feats perform'd
> Incredible to me, in this displeas'd
> That I was never present on the place
> Of those encounters, where we might have tried
> Each other's force in camp or listed field. (1082-1087)

In each case, language constructs a potential image of Samson which, if actualized, would curtail his destiny by assimilating his energy into the temporal order. In contrast, the "rousing motions" which reconstitute Samson's purpose are non-verbal and inarticulate. Samson does not even presume to describe them, and his own speech at that point becomes guarded, temperate, and humble.

Augustine's meditation on the meaning of time and eternity in Book XI of the Confessions provides an illustration of the relation between language and temporality. The meditation takes the form of a quest for a knowledge that is transcendent, for his quest depends upon the grace he invokes for guidance in the same way that his understanding of time depends on his awareness of eternity. The medium of his quest is language, and language is found to be both confining and liberating: confining since it imposes upon him the temporal conditions of sequence, dispersion, and knowledge without simultaneity; liberating since it leads him to the *telos* of illumination and awareness.

His point of departure is his desire to know the meaning of the first sentence of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Citing Psalm 32:9, "you spoke and they were made," Augustine recognizes that heaven and earth were created by the "Word" of God. Yet God's Word must be far different from "words which sound in time" (XI:6), for the motion and variation of language confirms the creaturely status it shares with earth and with time itself. Augustine reaches the distinction between the eternal *verbum* of God, through which "all is uttered at one and the same time" (XI:7), and the *vox* or human voice which responds to the Word. With this comes the recognition that words are not adequate to convey his understanding of eternity: "I do not know how to put it into words," he writes in XI:8. In XI:11 he asks: "Could mine be the hand strong enough to seize the minds of men? Could any words of mine have power to achieve so great a task?" The strain which his task places on language is integral to his definition of eternity.

Milton begins his epics in the same posture that Augustine begins his exploration of time and eternity. The invocation to Paradise Lost responds to the same text as Book XI of the Confessions: Moses' account of "the Beginning" when the Heav'ns and Earth/ Rose out of Chaos" (both Augustine and Milton believed Moses to be the author of Genesis). As with Augustine, Milton's high ambition is immediately tempered by a sense of dependence on divine assistance. His appeal for "aid to my advent'rous song" is repeated a number of times throughout the epic. Hence where Augustine writes: "O Lord, my hope, allow me to explore further. Do not let me grow confused and lose track of my purpose" (XI:18), Milton appeals to Urania to steady him lest "on the *Aleian* Field I fall/ Erroneous there to wander and forlorn" (VII:19-20).

For both Augustine and Milton, the dependence of their respective undertakings on the assistance of divine grace links their understanding of creation to their own inward recreation.[6] Milton prays for inward illumination from the Spirit which "from the first/ Wast present." He also identifies his muse as the sister of "Eternal Wisdom" which played in the presence of God before the world was made (VII:1-12). Augustine identifies his moments of illumination with Wisdom as well:

> What is that light whose gentle beams now and again strike through to my heart, causing me to shudder in awe yet firing me with their warmth? I shudder to feel how different I am from it: yet insofar as I am like it, I am aglow with its fire. It is the light of Wisdom, Wisdom itself, which at times shines upon me, parting my clouds. (XI:9)

Augustine's meditation is couched in an autobiography which focuses on religious conversion as an event which transforms the interpretation of his entire experience. Both writers seek ultimately to relate their own restless explorations and creative acts to God's creation of the universe, the event which is both the object of their insight and the source of their authority.

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[6] The analogy between the poet's creativity and divine creativity has also been examined in a comparison of Milton and Augustine by Martha R. Lifson, "Creation and the Self in Paradise Lost and the Confessions," Centennial Review, 19 (1975), 187-197.

The same meditation is initiated in Samson Agonistes where it is modified to suit Samson's limitations and situation. Samson feels himself an exile from the illumination and wisdom which the narrator of Paradise Lost and the author of the Confessions depend upon:

> But what is strength without a double share
> Of wisdom? Vast, unwieldy, burdensome,
> Proudly secure, yet liable to fall
> By weakest subtleties, not made to rule,
> But to subserve where wisdom bears command. (53-57)

The divine guidance which Milton invokes in the opening of Paradise Lost is intimated here in the ambiguous first line of the poem. The evocation of the twenty-third psalm in the first line revalues an appeal which would otherwise be limited to its temporal significance. The revaluation does not supplant the temporal, however. Rather, it transforms the ambiguity into a dichotomy of eternal and temporal possibilities which is sustained through the entire poem. As with Paradise Lost and the Confessions, we recognize that the first line of Samson Agonistes marks the beginning of a journey. Errant wandering on the one hand and pilgrimage or quest on the other represent alternative kinds of journeying which, while not exclusive of each other, mirror the interaction of eternity and time in experience.

Thus Samson's prologue, with its shifts in direction, its search for answers, its movement between the poles of hope and despair, faith and doubt, is a verbal journey which serves as a microcosm of Samson's life's journey. The prologue consists of a series of verbal trajections marked by clear reversals which arrest the course of his thoughts at the brink of despair. The trajections begin with questions which focus the paradoxes in his experience and the tensions between his expectations and his present reality:

> Why was my breeding order'd and prescrib'd
> As of a person separate to God,
> Design'd for great exploits; if I must die
> Betray'd, captiv'd, and both my Eyes put out,
> Made of my Enemies the scorn and gaze,

> To grind in Brazen Fetters under task
> With this Heav'n-gifted strength? (30-36)
>
> what is strength without a double share
> Of wisdom? (53-54)
>
> O first created Beam, and thou great Word,
> "Let there be light, and light was over all";
> Why am I thus bereav'd thy prime decree? (83-85)
>
> why was the sight
> To such a tender ball as th'eye confin'd? (93-94)

Samson repents of these thoughts -- repentance meaning literally to "turn around" -- by suggesting the inscrutability of providence:

> Yet stay, let me not rashly call in doubt
> Divine Prediction; what if all foretold
> Had been fulfill'd but through mine own default,
> Whom have I to complain of but myself? (43-46)
>
> But peace, I must not quarrel with the will
> Of highest dispensation, which herein
> Haply had ends above my reach to know. (60-62)

The mere phenomenon of change in Samson's thoughts in itself mirrors the temporal condition in which he is confined. Tragedy is the exploration of change and reversal in human experience, specifically when change is for the worse. The restless, shifting nature of the process of thought makes the prologue a compressed and intensified rendition of this most basic facet of life in time.

It is therefore, as Augustine argues, the temporal confinement of thought and language which makes the eternal unexplainable:

> Try as they may to savour the taste of eternity, their thoughts still twist and turn upon the ebb and flow of things in past and future time. But if only their minds could be seized and held steady, they would be still for a while and, for that short moment, they would glimpse the splendour of eternity which is forever still. (Confessions, XI:11)

As Cope, MacCaffrey and Fish have argued, the architectonic quality of Paradise Lost brings us near to this perspective in a manner which defies the discursive movement of language. Milton portrays this effect in Adam's attentiveness to Raphael's narrative:.

> The Angel ended, and in Adam's Ear
> So Charming left his voice, that he a while

Thought him still speaking, still stood fixt to hear. (VIII:1-3)

The calm steadiness of the Son on the pinnacle in Paradise Regained, compared with the flustered activities of Satan, also contrasts what Augustine calls the "splendour of eternity" with the "ebb and flow" of time. In Samson Agonistes, where the experience of fallen time is conveyed in the rashness and restlessness of speech, the eternal is approximated by the silence which marks the cessation of speech and the restoration of the conditions of Samson's covenant with God.

Milton's conception of time differs from that of Augustine insofar as Milton believes in a pre-creation history. While Augustine denies the existence of time before the creation of the world in order to stress its limitations, Milton encourages us to consider a number of pre-creation events, particularly the exaltation of the Son of God. Yet the resemblance between pre-creation history and fallen history, which Milton conveys through the technique of accommodation, also stresses the limits of fallen time. As Adam discovers in his vision of history, the finitude of fallen time will give way to "Eternity, whose end no eye can reach" (XII:556).Thus for both Milton and Augustine, the contrast between time and eternity encourages us to think beyond the limitations of fallen time, to consider what surmounts our reach, to know what time is and also what it is not. Just as eternity limits and defines the course of time, so too does the idea of eternity provide a meaningful frame of reference for speculations which would otherwise lack a conclusion.

Eternity therefore serves as what Paul Ricoeur calls a "limiting idea."In his analysis of the Confessions, Ricoeur suggests three ways in which "the meditation on eternity affects the speculation concerning time':

> Its first function is to place all speculation about time within the horizon of a limiting idea that forces us to think at once about time and about what is other than time. Its second function is to intensify the experience of the *distentio* [Augustine's definition of time as the extension of the soul] on the existential level. Its third function is to call upon this experience to surpass itself by moving in the direction of eternity, and hence to display an internal hierarchy in opposition to our fascination with the representation of rectilinear time. (Time and Narrative 22)

We have already seen an example of the way in which eternity serves as a limiting idea in Samson Agonistes in the prologue. The course of Samson's thoughts, which resemble the pattern of confession and questioning identified by Ricoeur in the Confessions, arrives at a point of reversal or repentance when Samson reminds himself not to quarrel with the inscrutable dispensations of providence. These reminders provide no real rest, however, since they are the product of a mind which believes itself to be exiled from providential concern. The genuine point of arrival which limits the restlessness of Samson's thoughts are the motions of grace which serve as the discernible point of reversal for the entire drama. Yet the movements towards points of silence, even though the silence is self-imposed, make the prologue a verbal microcosm of the entire drama.

We have also seen how Samson's experience of time is intensified by his awareness of the eternal. Here it is the discrepancy between expectation and reality, or as Anthony Low defines it, between explanation and experience, which measures Samson's sense of anguish and deepens his sense of failure. Once again, the "doubleness" of the images and symbols which represent his experience make the problem of personal responsibility more acute. Thus the physical confinement of the Philistine prison is perhaps not as agonizing as the spiritual confinement of blindness:

> Thou art become (O worst imprisonment!)
> The Dungeon of thyself; thy Soul
> (Which Men enjoying sight oft without cause complain)
> Imprison'd now indeed,
> In real darkness of the body dwells
> Shut up from outward light
> To incorporate with gloomy night;
> For inward light, alas,
> Puts forth no visual beam. (155-168)

The Chorus approaches Samson from a distance; the reader has already shared in Samson's inner sense of being "exil'd from light."

Generally speaking, the "double image" of the two Samsons -- the Samson of the past and the Samson of the present -- along with the "doubling" of various metaphors and symbols which intensifies this perspective, is based upon Samson's ability (and our ability) to compare eternity and time. Indeed, the acute polarity of critical opinion concerning Samson may manifest a polarity which is intrinsic to the text itself. There are, in a very real sense, two Samsons in Samson Agonistes just as there are two Augustines in the Confessions. It is, as Ricoeur suggests, the dialectic between "the sinner and the created being" (Time and Narrative 28). which causes the Confessions to unfold in the contrary modes of lamentation and praise. The comparison in turn aligns itself with Fish's assessment of the mind of Milton's "fit" reader as a place of conflict between the "old" and the "new" Adams. The exile and wandering of the fallen Adam represent time as distraction and separation. The inward illumination Samson experiences in a moment of "rousing motions" represent the reconstitution of the human image in an act of grace. The *locus classicus* of this distinction, which in my view serves as a valuable gloss on Samson Agonistes as well as a useful illustration of my interpretation of the poem, occurs in Confessions XI:21:

> I am divided between time gone by and time to come and its course is a mystery to me. My thoughts, the intimate life of my soul, are torn this way and that in the havoc of change. And so it will be until I am purified and melted by the fire of your love and fused into one with you.

If we return at this point to the question of the relation between inner and outer events in the poem, we must conclude that they are neither causally connected nor, strictly speaking disconnected. Events outside of Samson, which are mainly verbal in nature, are temporal "distractions." The inward illumination he experiences, which cannot even be verbalized, is, to paraphrase Saint Paul, one of the "unseen things" which are eternal.

Finally, the comparison of eternity and time leads us to re-evaluate the images and symbols of Samson's temporal experience in terms of what Ricoeur terms a "branching symbolism" which informs the entire poem (Time and Narative 28). Milton's evocation of the twenty-third psalm in the opening of the poem, which revalues the strictly temporal interpretation of the appeal made in the opening line without sacrificing it, inaugurates, through its tense ambiguity, a branching dialectic of temporal and eternal values which is developed throughout the poem. Ricoeur derives his concept of "branching symbolism" from Ladislas Boros' study of the categories of temporal experience in the writings of Saint Augustine.[7] Boros identifies four principal "categories" of temporality in Augustine's writings: dissolution, agony, banishment and night. As the term itself suggests, each category brings together a number of related images and metaphors of temporal experience under its heading. As Ricoeur points out, there "is not one of these four principal images or of their variants that does not receive the strength of its meaning *a contrario* in relation to the opposing symbolism of recollection, living fullness, being at home, and light" (Time and Narrative 28).

Temporality as a state of dissolution is best illustrated in Samson's reaction to the speech made by the Chorus in its first entrance. While the Chorus laments Samson's present condition, it also enumerates the exploits of "That Heroic, that Renown'd,/ Irresistible Samson"(125-126). These exploits occupy the middle third of the parode, the other two thirds of which are spent lamenting the state of him

> whose strength, while virtue was her mate,
> Might have subdu'd the Earth,
> Universally crown'd with highest praises. (173-175).

Hence the structure of the parode, with its roughly equal divisions between Samson past and Samson present, proceeds in the contrary modes of praise and lamentation which mirror the course of time. Yet Samson does not hear any of it:

> I hear the sound of words, thir sense the air
> Dissolves unjointed ere it reach my ear. (176-177)

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[7] "Les Categories De La Temporalite Chez Saint Augustin," Archives du Philosophie, 21 (1958), 323-385. The translation of Boros' terms and phrases into English is my own with the exception of "branching symbolism" which is taken from Ricoeur's discussion of Boros (Time and Narrative 1: 28-30).

It is the dissolution of language which mirrors the dissolution of time. Just as the words of the Chorus distract Samson, so too do the exploits they recount represent temporal distractions none of which alone has fulfilled the promise of Samson's nativity, and which taken together do not make a whole greater than the sum of their parts. Words, especially words that comprise human assertions about the course of time, thus function in contradistinction to the Word which creates. Samson recollects the prime decree in the prologue: "Let there be light, and light was over all"(84). The same Word, which enters time to create Samson's inner illumination, cannot be articulated by Samson because it is, paradoxically, not of time.

Temporality as agony includes, in Boros' opinion, the spiritual warfare which, second only to the metaphor of the journey, is the central life-metaphor in the puritan imagination. Commenting on Augustine, Boros states that "temporality for him essentially meant war" (345). Spiritual warfare exists, in Augustine's view, because of the dualities in human nature which exist after the Fall:

> Now this war would never have been if human nature had, by free choice, persisted in that right condition in which it was created. As it is, however, human nature has refused to keep that peace with God in happiness; and so in its unhappiness is at war with itself. (City of God, XXI:15)

In the Christian Doctrine, Milton describes the "struggle between flesh and spirit" and the "struggle against the world and Satan" as perpetual features of human life (YP:482). There is also the famous description of the "true, warfaring Christian" in Areopagitica who considers and yet abstains from vice.[8] Supporting both passages is Saint Paul's frequent use of warfare imagery in his epistles. The warfare between flesh and spirit has obviously been intense in Samson's life, and he has not always considered and abstained. Commenting on the figure in Judges, Gerhard Von Rad argues that

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[8] Merritt Hughes argues convincingly in favour of "warfaring" as opposed to "wayfaring" Christian in his edition of the text. See the Complete Prose and Major Poems of John Milton, 728.

"Samson finally founders in the great conflict between *eros* and *charisma*" (Old Testament Theology 1: 334). While this is an adequate assessment of the forces in Samson's personality, Milton uses them to illustrate Samson's final understanding of his dependence on providence. Milton's interpretation of the Judges narrative recognizes the paradox of strength based upon weakness which allowed the author of Hebrews to include Samson in his "cloud of witnesses" in Hebrews XI.

Temporality as night is obviously emphasized in Samson's blindness. Samson's lament for his blindness is a lament for the loss of a common rather than an extraordinary gift. As well as exiling him from God's "prime decree," blindness renders him defenseless in the presence of his enemies:

> I dark in light expos'd
> To daily fraud, contempt, abuse and wrong,
> Within doors, or without, still as a fool,
> In power of others, never in my own. (75-78)

While the contrary symbol of light takes on the positive value of divine presence and insight, the symbol of darkness is not wholly negative. In its strictly temporal value, darkness represents exile, abandonment and powerlessness as the consequences of sin and error. In its eternal aspect, however, we can recognize darkness as the necessary precondition to recreation. Thus in Genesis I:2 we read that "darkness was upon the face of the deep," and in the invocation to Paradise Lost the Spirit broods over this darkness in anticipation of creation. Again, this fruitful brooding can be contrasted with the sterile brooding of Samson's "restless thoughts." As with other contrasts developed in the pattern of branching symbolism in the poem, this contrast intensifies the dependence of the temporal upon the eternal. The duality of light and dark is, in fact, reconciled in Milton's description of God in Paradise Lost:

> when thou shad'st
> The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud
> Drawn round about thee like a radiant Shrine,
> Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear,
> Yet dazzle Heav'n, that brightest Seraphim
> Approach not, but with both wings veil thir eyes. (III:377-382)

Moreover, darkness is a symbol of divine presence rather than absence if it is related to the imagery used by Old Testament prophets to describe the concept of Holy War.[9]

Lastly, temporality as banishment conveys the idea that fallen time is not the natural condition of the soul: its "home" is elsewhere. The metaphor of journeying in exile can thus be recognized in its temporal aspect, where it is represented by errant and misguided wandering, and its eternal aspect in which wandering becomes a pilgrimage to another state. The metaphor of journeying is clearly an organizing premise in Milton's poetry and is an important image pattern in his prose as well. In particular, the New Testament parable of the prodigal son, with its pattern of going forth and returning to a paternal home, and its movement into and out of a state of dissolution, distraction and lost identity, is the basic paradigm of temporal experience which underlies Samson Agonistes. While prodigality is invariably reflected in the mode of lamentation, the contrary motions of pilgrimage and quest are reflected in praise which is the verbal mode of self-recollection, recognition, and return.

It is natural that these categories of temporal experience, which I have here only introduced, should be present in both Milton and Augustine, for both writers would find the common antecedents of these categories in the Bible. This form of comparison is worthwhile because it indicates, in my view, the means by which Milton expresses the relation between inner and outer experience in the poem. What we find in the pattern of branching symbolism which Milton orchestrates is the reply of the providence, which is otherwise hidden and silent, to Samson's condition. And this, in turn, establishes the dynamics of providential concern in the poem as it dramatizes a providence which, far from being constrained by the conditions Samson finds himself in, actually revalues them and makes use of them as indeed, in Milton's view, it could freely make use of anything.

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[9] This prophetic concept is examined in chapter four.

III: THE PSALMIST'S MEMORY

The various thematic, structural and symbolic forms of doubleness which inform Samson Agonistes are expressions of a dialectic which inheres in fallen human nature as Milton sees it. This dialectic, as Ricoeur defines it in his analysis of Augustine's Confessions, is that between the "sinner and the created being." The terms of the dialectic both support and correspond to the coexistence of the two different Samsons we encounter in the poem: Samson as he is, blinded and enslaved by his enemies, and Samson as he believes he was meant to be, the deliverer of Israel. Samson as he is is attributable to the sin of succumbing to the entreaties of Dalila and breaking the "seal of silence" which was the secret of his strength. Samson as he was meant to be is rooted in the divine covenant of his nativity when his destiny was foretold and his identity revealed.

Temporality is itself constituted by this dialectic as an expression of human nature. For Samson, as for Adam and Eve after the Fall, it appears that the permanence of the created being has been usurped by the transience of the sinner. In point of fact, in the fallen world, the created being -- the being whose potential redemption is already realized in the mind of God -- becomes an object of faith rather than of sight, for redemption can only be anticipated in patience because it depends upon the action of grace. This last observation is a central premise of Augustine's self-searching in the Confessions. In this chapter, I propose to extend my assessment of the relationship of Samson Agonistes to Augustine's ideas of temporality by considering the role of memory in the poem. An understanding of Milton's idea of memory draws from the tradition which begins with the seminal statements made by Augustine in De Trinitate, the Confessions and The City of God, and which leads to the importance of memory in the Puritan writings of Milton's era, most notably Bunyan's Grace Abounding. The greatest model for the role of memory in Samson Agonistes is, not surprisingly, the Bible, especially the Old Testament poems and narratives which Milton draws upon in the poem, and above all, as we shall discover, the Psalms.

Memory is integral to Augustine's conception of the divine image in which the human person is created. Unlike Milton, Augustine adheres to the orthodox conviction that the Godhead is a coequal and coeternal Trinity of three persons. Milton, as we have already noted, argues that the Son is subordinate to the Father and is begotten "within the limits of time," though the argument is not explicit in Paradise Lost and is most apparent in the Christian Doctrine. Augustine argues that if God is a Trinity, and if the individual is created in the image of God, then certain likenesses of the Trinity must be featured in a human being. In the constitution of the human mind, the faculties of memory, understanding, and will form a trinity in which the faculties correspond to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit respectively. Moreover, the unity which these three faculties display in their interactions with each other presents an analogy, however imperfectly it is preserved in our fallen nature, of the perfect unity of the divine Trinity:

> . . . we find in memory, understanding, and will a triad of certainties with regard to the nature of the mind. They present a single, substantial reality, in differing relations to itself; and they correspond coequally and completely to one another. (Later Works 72)

The place assigned to memory in this theory of resemblance between the Trinity and the mind as a created image of the trinity profoundly influenced the faculty psychology of the Renaissance. Indeed, as Louis Martz has shown, the trinitarian model of the mind was a theological commonplace even before the Renaissance. The model formed the basis for techniques of spiritual meditation developed by monastics such as Saint Bonaventure and Saint Bernard, and eventually came to influence the structure of the devotional lyrics of seventeenth century English poets such as Donne, Herbert, and others. As Martz argues:

> . . . a man with even slight theological training would have realized that the three powers of the soul were regarded as analogous to the Trinity, and that through the integration of this trinity within man he might come to know and feel in himself the operation of the higher Trinity: might (in St. Bernard's terminology) achieve through the reformed operation of these powers a renewal, a refreshing, of the defaced image of God within man. (The Poetry of Meditation 35)

Martz's analysis stresses the important link between knowledge of self and knowledge of God, a stress which is consistent with one of the central premises of Augustine's De Trinitate:

> It is best to take the maxim "know thyself" as an injunction to reflect upon our own nature, and to accept in practice our real status -- under God, over the material world. (Later Works 72)

It is worth remembering that the exhortation to "Know thyself," inscribed on Apollo's temple at Delphi, is a prominent theme in tragedy. In Shakespeare's King Lear, for example, Regan tells Goneril that Lear (who swears, ironically, by Apollo in his rage in the first scene) "hath ever but slenderly known himself" (I: i, 293). Blindness is a common metaphor for the absence of self-knowledge, even when a tragic figure is not physically blinded like Samson or Oedipus. Tragedy is, in many respects, the result of actions which issue from this kind of blindness. For Augustine, self-knowledge is a means to know something of Wisdom, the recognition that the revival of the mind not only actualizes a divine image but is in itself a divine gift. When Samson asks "what is strength without a double share/ Of wisdom," he indicates, perhaps without fully realizing it, that his actions were seldom, if ever, grounded in the contemplation of the relationship between his own being and God. The forced stasis of his confinement is, if nothing else, a condition in which contemplation can begin.

The correspondence between the Trinity and its created image is present in the writings of Puritans such as Bunyan. In the Pilgrim's Progress, when Christian arrives at the cross, the stage which represents justification by faith in Calvin's scheme of salvation, he is ministered to by a trinity of angelic figures:

> Now as he stood looking and weeping, behold three shining ones came to him, and saluted him, with *Peace be to thee*: so the first said to him, *Thy sins be forgiven*.. The second stript him of his Rags, and cloathed him with change of Raiment. The third also set a mark in his fore-head, and gave him a Roll with a Seal upon it, which he bid him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the Coelestial Gate. (31-32)

The presentation of the "shining ones" as a trinity" invokes, according to J.F. Forrest, "a great exegetical tradition, the roots of which run far back; for the early Fathers, including Augustine, accept as tokens of the Trinity the three angels who stood by Abraham (Gen. 18:12)" (61). Christian's "glad and lightsom" mood may well imply the recovered harmony of the inner faculties of memory, understanding and will even as the trinity of figures restores his outward image with their distinct yet cooperative functions.

Martz carefully qualifies the influence of the meditative techniques which evolved out of Augustine's model of the mind with respect to the puritan tradition.[1] There are no mechanics of salvation according to the strictest puritan attitudes, hence meditation as a technique can neither provoke the action of providence nor effect self-restoration. Any devotional practice is a sign rather than a cause of election. Milton's non-trinitarian theology, moreover, would prohibit him from adopting a trinitarian theory which is expressed through tripartite poetic structures. Yet Milton's theology does not devalue human effort as an expression of the will to know God, nor does it alienate him from the real role of memory in spiritual experience as Augustine defines it. For both Augustine and Milton, memory is the province of a spiritual quest or search in and through which the knowledge of self and the knowledge of God are reciprocal. Indeed, as a metaphorical region of the mind, memory is perhaps the equivalent, in

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[1] Martz discusses the writings of Richard Baxter as well as Milton in The Poetry of Meditation, 163-175.

Samson Agonistes, of the prospect from which Adam and Michael survey history in Paradise Lost.

Augustine's appeal to "know thyself" implies that the mind is both a means and an object of contemplation. In Augustine's opinion, God has endowed the mind with a capacity for self-knowledge which, if properly used, leads to a knowledge of God as well:

> The perfection of the divine image in the mind is the divine gift of wisdom, by which the mind becomes aware of God, and is not only "in" God, but "with" God through the revival in it of that "memory of God" which was never entirely obliterated. The mind's self-love is true, that is, for its own good, only when grounded on the love of God -- for which, as for the knowledge of God, it possesses a natural capacity, and which alone can satisfy its needs. (Later Works 97-98)

The "memory of God" is therefore an innate capacity of the human mind, though Augustine is careful to disavow the affinities this notion has with the platonic concept of a memory of pre-existence:

> Knowledge . . . is concerned with moral activity and the human history which instructs us therein. Wisdom is the contemplation of those eternal forms or principles of which Plato wrote; though his doctrine that the soul retains a memory of them from a former existence is unsatisfactory. It is better to believe that the mind is enlightened by a spiritual sun, as the eye by a physical. (Later Works 94)

The soul is thus called upon to remember its origins as a created being, a memory which ultimately converges with the "memory of God."[2] Samson's interior illumination, a recovery of spiritual if not physical sight, restores the balance between knowledge and wisdom, action and contemplation and makes real, at the end of the drama, symbolic events which were confined to a benighted memory in the prologue: the "prime decree" of light in Genesis and the advent of the luminous, angelic messenger of Samson's nativity.

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[2] Confessions X:17-19 also develops this idea.

Even before the Fall, Adam undertakes a practical demonstration of these aspects of memory. In Book VIII of Paradise Lost, he offers humbly, but as Raphael insists, also quite valuably, to reciprocate after the angel has recounted the War in Heaven and the Creation:

> Thee I have heard relating what was done
> Ere my remembrance: now hear me relate
> My Story, which perhaps thou hast not heard;
> And Day is not yet spent. (VIII:203-206)

Raphael's reply confirms that Adam's exercise of memory is part of the fulfilment of his creaturely status:

> Nor are thy lips ungraceful, Sire of men,
> Nor tongue ineloquent; for God on thee
> Abundantly his gifts hath also pour'd
> Inward and outward both, his image fair. (VIII:218-221).

Eve likewise recollects the dawning of her self-awareness in Book IV:

> That day I oft remember, when from sleep
> I first awak't, and found myself repos'd
> Under a shade on flow'rs, much wond'ring where
> And what I was, whence hither brought, and how. (IV:449-452).

Her account includes her momentary captivation by her own reflected image in a pool of water where she lingers until a voice warns her that the image is transient and ephemeral. The voice guides her to

> where no shadow stays
> Thy coming, and thy soft imbraces, hee
> Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy
> Inseparably thine. (IV:470-473).

Although, in the case of Eve, the pattern is made to conform with Milton's now notorious maxim "He for God only, she for God in him," the movement from the transient, outward shadow to the eternal, inward image, and from knowledge of self to knowledge of God, is the proper pattern for the meditative memory.

When, at the close of Book III of Paradise Lost, the disguised Satan inquires about the location of earth, the angel Uriel assumes that he is undertaking the same kind of retrospective meditation which Adam and Raphael share:

> For wonderful indeed are all his works,
> Pleasant to know, and worthiest to be all
> Had in remembrance always with delight. (III:702-704).

In Satan, however, the pattern of remembrance is arrested at the stage of self love and self knowledge which, insofar as they become ends in themselves rather than means to a greater awareness, isolate and confine his intellect from the more expansive contexts which frame the brief innocence of Adam and Eve. Satan's degeneration is characterized by a very selective, self-serving and surprisingly limited memory, as he demonstrates when he argues against Abdiel in the presence of his rebel legions:

> who saw
> When this creation was? remember'st thou
> Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?
> We know no time when we were not as now;
> Know none before us, self-begot, self-rais'd
> By our own quick'ning power. (V: 856-861)

The creature's memory terminates with the illusion of self-creation rather than progressing to a real knowledge of the Creator. Satan cultivates the same illusion in Eve at the Fall.

While unfallen memory is an expansive power of meditation which is continuous with the identities of Adam and Eve as they exist in the present, fallen memory recognizes the rupture or discontinuity between, as Samson puts it, "what once I was, and what am now," for it is conscious of the disparity between past and present, and functions in a dialectic of then and now. Satan is candid about this when he confesses that hell would have no intensity if it were not for memory. He hates the sun's rays in Eden because they "bring to my remembrance from what state/ I fell, how glorious once above thy Sphere"(IV: 38-39). The narrator articulates the relation between Satan's memory and despair:

> Now conscience wakes despair
> That slumber'd, wakes the bitter memory
> Of what he was, what is, and what must be
> Worse; of worse deeds worse sufferings must ensue. (IV: 23-26)

Adam, Eve, and Samson as well, are initiated into a similar sense of temporal rupture as they become conscious of their fallen condition.

The Fall, and lapses such as Samson's which are extension of it, hinges upon the difference between remembering and forgetting. The meditative memory is not simply a spiritual pleasure but a responsibility which is critical to moral choices made in the present. "Remember what I warn thee," God tells Adam at the Tree of Knowledge, "shun to taste/ And shun the bitter consequence" (VIII: 327-328). After the Fall becomes fact, the narrator reminds the reader:

> still they knew, and ought to have still remember'd ✓
> The high Injunction not to taste that Fruit,
> Whoever tempted. (X: 12-14)

In the Christian Doctrine, Milton argues that the Tree of Knowledge "was not a sacrament, as is commonly thought, for sacraments are meant to be used, not abstained from; but it was a kind of pledge or memorial of obedience"(YP: 352). The corresponding "memorial" for Samson is, of course, the hair that is the repository of his strength, though more depends upon maintaining this as a secret.

The persistent and difficult question which applies to both the Tree of Knowledge and to Samson's hair is this: why would God confer great gifts and important destinies upon creatures if He could foresee their downfalls? As Samson complains:

> Why was my breeding order'd and prescrib'd
> As of a person separate to God,
> Design'd for great exploits; if I must die
> Betray'd, Captiv'd, and both my Eyes put out,
> Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze. (30-34).

The integrity of free will is certainly one answer, but the distinction between sight and blindness, which Samson dwells upon in this passage, suggests another. In De Trinitate, Augustine argues that our comprehension of such questions is restricted by the temporal modes of thought and language: "Our temporal modes of existence and thought make it impossible for us to comprehend a wisdom which is both memory and fore-knowledge. We see 'in a glass darkly'" (Later Works 126). The distinction between sight and faith, between seeing and believing, is a central premise in both Augustine and Milton. Apart even from his physical blindness, Samson must recognize his relationship with a God who "seems to hide his face," as the Chorus remarks in an echo of the psalms. Faith is a condition of the temporal journey; sight is a condition of the eternal home. In the absence of sight, faith needs memory to recollect the mind's status as a divine image. In contrast to this image, idols such as Dagon, who is only half human, are created in the image of a fallen human nature which can no longer recollect its own worth.

Memory is clearly another aspect of the "double" nature of Samson Agonistes, for as we have seen, it functions in two distinct ways. Once again, the double nature of memory is grounded in the dialectic between the sinner and the created being which governs the poem. The meditative memory which recollects the creature's status as a divine image, and thus proceeds from self knowledge to knowledge of God, is expansive, edifying, and decisive in its moral impact on the present. The memory which recollects the creature's sins or failings is divided by the tenses of past and present, and can of itself be as confining as Samson's prison. We have seen how these two aspects of memory are elaborated in Augustine's De Trinitate. They are also strikingly illustrated in the writings of Milton's puritan contemporary, John Bunyan, the preface to whose spiritual autobiography is wholly occupied with the double role of memory in the spiritual life.

Bunyan addresses the preface to his parishioners during the time of his confinement in prison, and stresses to them the importance of memory in withstanding temptation. Interestingly, he compares himself to Samson in his combat with the lion whose bleached carcass later provided him with honey: "Temptations, when we meet them at first, are as the lion that roared upon Samson; but if we overcome them, the next time we see them, we shall find a nest of honey within them" (Grace Abounding

3). Bunyan may be referring to the temptation to conform and so secure his own release from prison. The analogy, however, expresses his personal experience so that it can be conserved in the memories of his parishioners for their future advantage. The balance of the preface lists biblical citations which stress the urgency of memory:

> Moses (Num. xxxiii. 1,2) writ of the journeyings of the children of Israel, from Egypt to the land of Canaan; and commanded also, that they did remember their forty years' travel in the wilderness. . . . Wherefore this I have endeavoured to do; and not only so, but to publish it also; that, if God will, others may be put in remembrance of what he hath done for their souls, by reading his work upon me. (Grace Abounding 4)

The preface leads to Bunyan's articulation of the two aspects of memory in a manner which suggests the interaction between them:

> Oh, the remembrance of my great sins, of my great temptations, and of my great fears of perishing for ever! They bring afresh into my mind the remembrance of my great help, my great support from heaven, and the great grace that God extended to such a wretch as I.

Here Bunyan provides his own solution to Samson's famous riddle as the memory of hardship and temptation takes on a positive value, after the passage of time, emerging as a "drop of honey" from the carcass of a fierce lion.

For Bunyan, as for Milton, memory provides a context for the present which widens the scope of a particular moment by framing it with precedents from Biblical history. These precedents in turn define the moment in terms of the relationship between the individual or the community and God. While Bunyan's preface combines the historical examples of Moses, Samson, David and Paul, Milton generally extends his frame of reference to include cosmic history by recollecting the creative power demonstrated by God in the creation of the universe. The invocation to Paradise Lost acknowledges the guidance of Moses, who is

> That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
> In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
> Rose out of Chaos. (I: 8-9)

Yet it is the "Beginning," as history, which Milton seeks in order to locate his poetic enterprise within the movement of a creative and redemptive providential history. The preparation of the prophetic narrator is therefore framed by the divine act of creation.

Memory, self-knowledge and relationship with God also combine in Paradise Regained in the temptation of the Son who trusts that "what concerns my knowledge God reveals" (I: 293). Samson is also occupied with self-knowledge insofar as it defines his relationship with God. Unlike the Son, however, who is at the beginning of his ministry, Samson believes that his spectacularly bungled career is at an end:

> This only hope relieves me, that the strife
> With mee hath end; all the contest is now
> 'Twixt God and Dagon. (460-462)

In spite of the sense of resignation which informs this statement, Samson, Manoa and the Chorus continue to explore the possibility that Samson was, and perhaps still is, a uniquely charismatic image of his creator. When the Chorus describes Samson's strength, which is his particular charisma, they speak of it in terms of image, likeness and similitude rather than as something absolute, independent, or self-fulfilling. The Chorus appeals to God thus:

> So deal not with this once thy glorious Champion,
> The Image of thy strength, and mighty minister. (705-706)

Elsewhere, in a cryptic allusion to the Atlas myth, the Chorus contrasts Samson's historic reality with classical fabling: he is : "Like whom the Gentiles feign to bear up Heav'n"(150). Finally, when Samson stands at the pillars in Dagon's temple, the Hebrew Messenger, speaking from memory, does not say that Samson prayed but that

> he stood, as one who pray'd,
> Or some great matter in his mind revolv'd. (1637-38)

This description sustains the tension between the man and the image he represents even as it appears to fulfill the prayer of the opening line of the poem, which is couched in ambiguity. Since prayer is communication between Samson and God, the motif of image or likeness, while it concerns a unique and extraordinary gift in Samson, rests upon Samson as a common or typical image of God, a God Samson must both remember and be remembered by, as the psalms which Milton draws upon show.

In Interpreting Samson Agonistes, Joseph Wittreich contends that Milton's purpose in Samson Agonistes is to subvert the image of Samson as the venerable Christian saint, the type of Christ, and the hero of faith canonized in the eleventh chapter of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews. Wittreich summons historical evidence to demonstrate that Samson's typological relation to Christ was, by Milton's era, more contrastive rather than comparative. The hypothesis is that "Milton's Samson appears in the image and likeness -- as the similitude -- of the biblical Samson and hence not as the counterpart but as the countertype of Christ, and of the poet's own true self, and as a foil to the political program Milton urges upon his people in the aftermath of a failed revolution" (xii). Wittreich's contrastive typology is well-documented. Nor does he neglect the dimension of contrast and ambivalence which inheres in traditional, comparative typological relationships. In rigidly promoting the contrastive dimension of Samson typology, however, Wittreich perhaps risks diminishing the dialectic of "the sinner and the created being," and neutralizing other tensions which are so vital to the poem.

Part of Wittreich's methodology can be applied to the role of memory in the poem in important ways. Since Samson Agonistes is a recreation of the Judges narrative, any changes, additions, deletions or conspicuous repetitions which Milton makes in his retelling of the story convey meaning. Wittreich argues that Milton's alterations

> . . . amount to intensifications of certain of its concerns -- with reprobation, cruelty, and vengeance certainly, but also with marriage and deliverance. Through a rigorously exercised principle of selection, Milton establishes foci and asserts emphases for the already organized history related in the Book of Judges. (Interpreting Samson Agonistes 80)

The recreation of a narrative necessarily involves the interpretation and criticism of the original narrative as well. In Wittreich's view, the critical impulse in Samson Agonistes is highly iconoclastic of Samson as a valid type of Christ because it seeks to clarify the tragic process of history.

While Samson Agonistes is certainly the work of a single author, we should bear in mind, in considering Wittreich's approach, that the poem differs from both Paradise Lost or Paradise Regained by virtue of what it lacks: a narrator who claims the authority of prophetic inspiration and who regularly intercedes to influence our perceptions of characters and events, as, for example, when the narrator responds to the seductive speeches of Satan. The characters in Samson Agonistes are engaged in dialogue, and their dialogue often consists of prompting, supplementing and interpreting each other's memory of events. When Samson recalls Israel's complacency at times which, in Samson's opinion, were opportune for deliverance, the Chorus frames the memory of Samson's exploits in the context of the Judges chronicle:

> Thy words to my remembrance bring
> How Succoth and the Fort of Penuel
> Thir great Deliverer contemn'd
> The matchless Gideon in pursuit
> Of Madian and her vanquisht Kings:
> And how ingrateful Ephraim
> Had dealt with Jephtha, who by argument,
> Not worse than by his shield and spear
> Defended Israel from the Ammonite,
> Had not his prowess quell'd thir pride
> In that sore battle when so many died
> Without Reprieve adjudg'd to death,
> For want of well pronouncing Shibboleth. (277-289)

Samson responds by saying: "Of such examples add mee to the roll." The line reflects his bitterness, yet it may also allude to the roll of the faithful in Hebrews XI where Samson is enshrined by Saint Paul with Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah and others.

Samson Agonistes is consistent with the Judges narrative insofar as it seeks to clarify the tragic patterns of history, within the life of a single figure, represented by the Judges narrator. Hebrews XI is in part an interpretation of the Judges narrative. The Epistle is also, arguably, an interpretive link between the known history of Judges and Samson Agonistes. While the historic scope of Hebrews XI presents a frame of reference which is hidden from Milton's characters but available to the reader, yet the characters are engaged, even before the catastrophe, in reading Samson's experience into their sense of providential history. It is clearly significant that Gideon and Jephtha, the two figures which frame the career of Samson in Hebrews XI, are also the figures recounted in the Chorus' speech above:

> And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; and of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:
> Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,
> Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. (32-34)

The passage culminates in an articulation of the ethic of patience which is the foundation of Milton's concept of heroic action: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (XII: 1). Samson cannot, of course, anticipate the New Testament interpretation from his own position in history, but he does view his own special election to God's service as an extension of the original covenant made to Abraham. His career, he believes, should have produced "some great act/ Or benefit reveal'd to Abraham's race" (29-30). Samson frames his own career in the context of the covenantal history which begins with the annunciation to Abraham, and Abraham is in turn a central figure in Hebrews XI where he is presented as a prime example of "provisional" faith, a faith in which ignorance rather than knowledge of the future is a feature of patience and a parameter of faith. As Calvin states in his commentary on Hebrews XI, "faith can no more be separate from patience than from it selfe" (238).

The limitations of our perceptions take on a positive value in the Pauline doctrine of provisional faith, a doctrine which the first line of Samson Agonistes evokes in its dependent, future-oriented prayer for guidance. The genre of tragedy, of which the poem is a Christian example, is inherently concerned with human near-sightedness and the fallibilities of our understanding in their most damaging and injurious potentials. In the interpretations they place upon the past, the characters in the poem seek an order and coherence which is not yet available, and indeed is not available in the past as Samson has lived it, for the picaresque exploits of his career have not produced anything to justify the promise of his nativity, the one event in his life in which the potential for meaning still resides, the one event in his life which he did not instigate. What we witness, in fact, is the dissolution of the past, and hence of human interpretations of it, under the relentless pressure of a present which consists of humiliation, servitude and defeat. That present is the point of arrival for the Chorus' recollections of Samson:

> In seeking just occasion to provoke
> The Philistine, thy Country's Enemy,
> Thou never wast remiss, I bear thee witness:
> Yet Israel still serves with all his Sons. (237-240)

Earlier, when the Chorus enters and delivers its parode, they cite a number of Samson's past exploits and marvel at the thought of him

> whose strength, while virtue was her mate,
> Might have subdu'd the Earth,
> Universally crown'd with highest praises. (173-175)

Highest praises are verbal praises, yet the Chorus' speech reaches Samson in fragments of incoherent sound:

> I hear the sound of words, thir sense the air
> Dissolves unjointed ere it reach my ear. (176-177)

The entire drama is concerned with the relationship between words and actions, as the "flyting" of Harapha, or Samson's belief that his "deeds themselves, though mute, spoke loud the doer"(248) suggest. The fragmentation of the Chorus' speech in Samson's consciousness conveys the authentic relationship between words and actions prior to Samson's recollection by the eternal, omnific word which reverses the action. The dissolution of language mirrors the dissolution of time itself and conveys, along with the dissonance between expectation and reality which fragments his consciousness, the impermanent and distracted nature of the actions he believed would deliver Israel.

As an interpretation of the Book of Judges, Samson Agonistes retains what Gerhard Von Rad calls the "pessimistic conception of the charismatic leader" found in Judges and also reflects upon the repetitious patterns of apostasy which make history tragic (Old Testament Theology 1: 329). In fact, Milton endows Samson with some of the hard-earned objectivity of the Judges narrator, for Samson, like the biblical redactor, can generalize upon the history of his people:

> But what more oft in Nations grown corrupt,
> And by thir vices brought to servitude,
> Than to love Bondage more than Liberty,
> Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty. (268-271)

But the destruction of Samson as a typological icon is neither the end nor the purpose of Milton's poetic argument. By radically devaluing human action and human interpretations of action, Milton refines his conception of patience, which is the authentic purpose of his theodicy, by causing us to recognize that it is the God who "seems to hide his face," and not Samson, who is the real protagonist of history. Patience, as Milton conceives it, means that the individual cannot act meaningfully, and in a very real sense cannot do anything, without God.

The pessimism of the Judges narrator is apparent in the tension he establishes between remembering and forgetting. Israel's future depends upon its ability to remember and be guided by the covenant which defines its relationship with God. Wandering, exile, and waywardness begin with the failure to remember. The carefully structured, sequential quality of the Book of Judges, designed perhaps to give priority to an experiential pattern rather than to the chronology of the events it records, heightens the sense of monotony, repetition and predictability which characterize the pattern of apostasy. The various stories of the Judges are thus divided by what amounts to a tragic refrain: "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord" (10: 6). The narrator's ability to generalize the pattern, which he does before his accounts of the particular judges begins, is quite damning:

> Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.
> And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord, but they did not so. (2: 16-17)

The difference between worshipping the true God and submitting to idolatry is clearly predicated upon the tension between remembering and forgetting. While self-knowledge leads to a knowledge of God in the Augustinian pattern of meditative memory, idolatry, in contrast, contains a distinct element of self-worship. This is apparent in Satan's temptation of Eve when he encourages her to think of herself as a goddess even as he leads her to idolize the Tree of Knowledge. When Samson recalls that he formerly walked about "like a petty God" he illustrates not only the Greek sin of *hubris* or overweening pride, but also the obverse of genuine self-remembrance.

By means of the device of repetition, which gives emphasis to events which might only be repeated once in the Judges narrative, Milton establishes two clear centers of gravity in Samson's memory. As a result, Samson's recollections take on a characteristic "double focus." The first focus, alluded to no less than eight times in the poem, is Samson's nativity. The second focus, referred to at least seven times, is Samson's marriage to Dalila (the marriage is also a significant change, for the Bible does not say that Samson and Dalila were married).[4] The rough equivalence of references to the nativity and the marriage, which occur intermittently throughout the text and are not bound to any one episode, reinforce their status as the two poles or foci between which Samson's recollections oscillate. Again, the double focus of Samson's memory is grounded in the dialectic between the created being and the sinner which governs the poem. The nativity corresponds to his identity as a created image of God who is elected to the special service of Israel's deliverance. The marriage corresponds to his identity as a lapsed, errant creature who has at best not lived up to the promise of his birth. Interestingly, a double nature inheres in each of these two events: the angel of Samson's nativity is a "twice-descending" angel, a feature which, to Samson, seems to make the forecasts made at his birth more emphatic, but which actually portends the return of providential aid at the climax of the drama. Samson's marriage to Dalila, meanwhile, is his second marriage, his first being to the bride of Timna and brought about, Samson believes, by divine impulsion.

Some critics have suggested that Milton married Samson and Dalila in order to further the work of his divorce tracts. Samson Agonistes is not inconsistent with the ideals of the tracts, but the marriage is also necessary to the art of the poem, for marriage gives their relationship the status of a sacred covenant and thereby makes it comparable to the second focus of Samson's memory, his nativity, which he also views as a covenant. In The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce Milton repeatedly applies the word covenant to marriage: "Marriage is a covenant the very being whereof consists not in a forced cohabitation and counterfeit performance of duties, but in unfeigned love and peace" (Hughes 710). In the course of their encounter, Samson accuses Dalila of "feign'd Religion" and "smooth hypocrisy" (872).

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[4] My enumeration of references to Samson's nativity includes two references to his membership in the Nazirite cult. The angel in the annunciation narrative in Judges says :"the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death" (14: 7). Samson's abstinence from wine and his preference for water is, in this sense, a memorial of, and hence an allusion to, his nativity. The light imagery Milton applies to this particular part of Samson's memory evokes the dazzling splendour of the angel of his birth, See ll. 547-552).

Milton does not apply the word covenant to Samson's nativity, but the word "promise," which is his definitive word for the nativity, is a synonym for covenant. The unique prescriptions of his membership in the Nazirite cult are based on vows or promises which follow from his birth. More generally, he sees his vocation as Israel's deliverer as an extension of the original promise or covenant made between Israel and God through Abraham. Here again, the relevant passage in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews equates promise with covenant: "By faith [Abraham] sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" (11: 9). Samson refers to God as the "God of Abraham," and to himself as one of "Abraham's race." Covenant can also be associated with, and indeed is framed by, the original act of creation. Samson calls light God's "prime decree," and the decrees of his nativity are announced in the fiery, luminous descent of the angelic messenger. His restoration to the covenant of divine service is also perceived by "inward eyes illuminated." Covenant is not, therefore, a manifestation of simple legalism but an expression of divine creativity.

By means of repetition, Milton establishes Samson's nativity and his marriage to Dalila as the events which comprise the "double focus" of Samson's memory. The two events underlie the polarities which govern the poem because they are the basis of Samson's sense of divided identity. The nativity covenant defines the hero as a being created in the image of God and elected to be the champion of Israel. His marriage to Dalila leads him to break the terms of the nativity covenant and so to decline to the stature of a lapsed sinner and a defeated prisoner. Samson's thoughts oscillate between these two events until the moment when his divinely promised identity is restored.

Insofar as it distinguishes the persistent features of the memories of the characters, the technique of repetition brings out the genuine intricacy of Milton's plot, for the forward moving episodes of the drama consist largely of the characters' attempts to elicit patterns and meanings from past events. Even the catastrophe at the pillars is conveyed through the memory of the Hebrew Messenger, and while this conventional method conforms to Aristotle's censure of visible stage spectacle, it also thematizes the verbal construction, interpretation and communication of events. In the middle episodes especially, verbal recollection enacts an excursion into the past and thereby represents a form of the temporal metaphor of wayfaring in two distinct aspects: the aspect of prodigality, which involves errant wandering and exile, and the aspect of quest, which involves a deliberate search for identity.

A comparison of Samson to the prodigal son, the subject of the New Testament parable related in Luke 15: 11-32, places emphasis on the relationship between father and son in the poem. This relationship is more often perceived in terms of Manoa's attempts to secure Samson's release from the Philistines; his off-stage activities consist of bargaining and negotiating with his son's captors. This "ransom plot" presents an analogy of providential deliverance as Manoa's behind-the scenes activities parallel the hidden movement of providence which directs Samson's actions at the appointed time, with providential design differing strikingly from human intention. Samson may be thought of as having two fathers -- God and Manoa -- a perception which is strengthened by the typological associations between the annunciation narrative of Samson's nativity and the narrative of Christ's nativity in Luke.

The nature of the father-son relationship in the parable of the prodigal son is equally important to Samson Agonistes, though it is often overlooked in favour of the ransom plot. Yet Samson is a type of the prodigal son who has squandered the inheritance of his divine strength and charisma. When the prodigal son reflects upon his wasted situation we read: "he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him" (Luke 15:16). Samson, surveying his prison, recognizes that he is :

> Inferior to the vilest now become
> Of man or worm; the vilest here excel me,
> They creep, yet see. (73-75)

The turning point in the parable of the prodigal son occurs in a moment of self-recollection and remembrance. The Authorized Version reads:

> And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!
>
> I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
>
> And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. (Luke 15: 17-19)

The phrase "he came to himself" suggests an awakening or realization in a manner which emphasizes the recovery of lost identity as a precondition to the homeward journey. The same recovery is signalled in Samson Agonistes when the Chorus heralds Samson's decision to go with the Philistine Officer: "In time thou hast resolv'd, the man returns" (1390) and when Manoa, after hearing the Hebrew Messenger's report of Samson's martyrdom, exclaims: "Samson hath quit himself/ Like Samson" (1709-10).

The pattern of lost and recovered identity, of exile and return, of forgetting and recollection, which is traced in the parable of the prodigal son, is also the pattern of history we encounter throughout the Bible, and most notably in Judges with its succession of apostasies and defections followed by deliverance. Northrop Frye describes the pattern as "roughly U-shaped." In the Book of Judges, Frye argues,

> . . a series of stories of traditional tribal heroes is set within a repeating *mythos* of the apostasy and restoration of Israel. This gives us a narrative structure that is roughly U-shaped, the apostasy being followed by a descent into disaster and bondage, which in turn is followed by repentance, then by a rise through deliverance to a point more or less on the level from which the descent began. . . . The same U-shaped narrative is found outside the historical sections also, in the account of the disasters and restoration of Job and in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. This last, incidentally, is the only version in which the redemption takes place as a result of a voluntary decision on the part of the protagonist. (The Great Code 169-170)

While Frye is correct to identify the narrative structure of the parable with the essential pattern of history articulated in the Old Testament, his interpretation of the parable seems to me to simplify its turning point. Again, the phrase "he came to himself" implies the reunification of an identity which is divided in the same way as Samson's. A restoration which is primarily the result of human volition ascribes to the turning point the kind of causal logic which Samson Agonistes and, to my mind, the parable, both escape. The reunification of the human and the divine depends not only upon the individual remembering God but upon God remembering the individual, and while this critical nexus is "hidden" in Samson Agonistes, it is a prominent theme in the Old Testament, not only in Judges where the raising up of charismatic champions represents God's memory of his covenant with Israel, but also in the Psalms which Milton continually evokes in the poem.

As is the case in Samson Agonistes, prodigality is one of the organizing metaphors of Augustine's Confessions:

> The prodigal son of the Scriptures went to live in a distant land to waste in dissipation all the wealth which his father had given him when he set out. But, to reach that land, he did not hire horses, carriages, or ships; he did not take to the air on real wings or set one foot before the other. For you were the Father who gave him riches. You loved him when he set out and you loved him still more when he returned without a penny. But he set his heart on pleasure and his soul was blinded, and this blindness was the measure of the distance he travelled away from you, so that he could not see your face. (I: 18)

Temporality for Augustine means that the soul enters into a state of distraction, alienation and fragmentation. Hence the action of memory, enacted in the verbal record of autobiography, seeks to discover the soul's eternity through self-retrieval:

> For love of your love I shall retrace my wicked ways. The memory is bitter, but it will help me to savour your sweetness, the sweetness that does not deceive but brings real joy and never fails. For love of your love I shall retrieve myself from the havoc of disruption which tore me to pieces when I turned away from you, whom alone I should have sought, and lost myself instead on many a different quest. (II: 1)

In Book XI of the City of God, Augustine compares the power of the meditative memory to retrieve the scattered pieces of our being to the experience of the prodigal son

> Therefore let us run over all these things which he created in such wonderful stability, to collect the scattered traces of his being, more distinct in some places than in others. And let us gaze at his image in ourselves, and, "returning to ourselves," like the younger son in the Gospel story, let us rise up and go back to him from whom we have departed in our sinning. (XII: 28)

The process of self-retrieval is clearly intentional, but the passage itself, like so much of the Confessions, is an apostrophe to God and, as such, is a mode which should rightly be termed prayer. In the same way, the invocations in Paradise Lost are wrought as prayers for the composure and integrity of the self. In Samson Agonistes, apostrophes to God are used consistently by the Hebrew characters, and Samson, when he is poised between the pillars, is said to stand "as one who prayed." And in fact, psalmic utterances and allusions to the psalms are focal points for the action of memory in Samson Agonistes.

A number of critics have recognized the importance of the Psalms to Samson Agonistes. Notable among these are Mary Ann Radzinowicz, who has catalogued the many references to the Psalms which occur in the poem (Towards Samson Agonistes 368-382) and John Wall ("The Contrarious Hand" 117-139) who has compared the poem to the genre of the biblical lament. It is possible that Milton's concept of dramatic reversal as well as his use of the "double outcome," both of which have proved controversial with respect to the strictest Aristotelian precepts, are, in fact, influenced by similar structural features in the Psalms. Primarily, however, the role of memory in the Psalms influences Milton's expression of the individual and communal time-consciousness of his characters in Samson Agonistes.

That the Psalms could influence Milton's treatment of the genre of classical tragedy is not surprising, for the Psalms were acknowledged in the Renaissance as formally crafted works of literary art. Robert Alter observes:

> It is symptomatic of the general response to these poems that so many poets in Renaissance England, though equally innocent of Hebrew and of an understanding of biblical poetic structure, should have tried their hand at producing English versions of the Psalms. In whatever way biblical versification was thought to work, it was almost universally assumed that the psalms exhibited the rhythmic regularity, the symmetries, the cadenced repetitions, of artful poems. (Biblical Poetry 111)

The importance of the psalter in church liturgy is at least one reason for the influence of the Psalms on Donne and Herbert, both of whom were priests and both of whose lyrics frequently take the form of prayer as a direct address to God. Sir Philip Sidney, whose translation of the Psalms was completed after his death by his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, cites the Psalms in his Defense of Poetry to uphold the value of imaginative literature in his Defense of Poetry:

> And may I not presume a little further to show the reasonableness of this word *vates*, and say that the holy David's Psalms are a divine poem? If I do, I shall not do it without the testimony of great learned men, both ancient and modern. But even the name of Psalms will speak for me, which, being interpreted, is nothing but Songs; then, that is fully written in metre, as all learned Hebricians agree, although the rules be not yet fully found; lastly and principally, his handling his prophecy, which is merely poetical. For what else is there of his musical instruments, the often and free changing of persons, his notable prosopoeias, when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in His majesty, his telling of the beasts' joyfulness and hills' leaping, but a heavenly poesy, wherein he showeth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith? (22)

In the Reason of Church Government, Milton praises "those frequent songs throughout the law and prophets beyond all these, not in their divine argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition, may be easily made appear over all the kinds of lyric poesy to be incomparable" (Hughes, 669). Perhaps his most emphatic declaration of the pre-eminence of biblical poetry is found in Paradise Regained. The Son tells Satan:

> . . . if I would delight my private hours
> With Music or with Poem, where so soon
> As in our native Language can I find
> That solace? All our Law and Story strew'd
> With Hymns, our Psalms with artful terms inscrib'd
> Our Hebrew Songs and Harps in *Babylon*,
> That pleas'd so well our Victors' ear, declare
> That rather *Greece* from us these Arts deriv'd;
> Ill imitated, while they loudest sing
> The vices of thir Deities, and thir own
> In Fable, Hymn or Song, so personating
> Thir Gods ridiculous, and themselves past shame.
> Remove their swelling Epithets thick laid
> As varnish on a Harlot's cheek, the rest,
> Thin sown with aught of profit or delight,
> Will far be found unworthy to compare
> With *Sion's* songs, to all true tastes excelling,
> Where God is prais'd aright, and Godlike men,
> The Holiest of Holies, and his Saints. (IV: 331-349)

Milton translated psalms 1 to 8 and psalms 80 to 88. Perhaps more striking than these translations are the psalm-like utterances he creates in his major works as spontaneous expressions of praise or lamentation. The morning prayer of Adam and Eve in Book V of Paradise Lost is introduced as a kind of psalm:

> Lowly they bow'd adoring, and began
> Thir Orisons, each Morning duly paid
> In various style, for neither various style
> Nor holy rapture wanted they to praise
> Thir Maker, in fit strains pronounct or sung
> Unmeditated, such prompt eloquence
> Flow'd from thir lips, in Prose or numerous Verse,
> More tuneable than needed Lute or Harp
> To add more sweetness . . . . (V: 144-152)

The titles of many of the psalms indicate that they were set to stringed instruments. In Milton's Eden, before the "alter'd style" of the Fall succeeds the "various style" of innocence, the unaccompanied human voice exceeds the power of instrumentation.

The range of expression present in the psalms impressed Renaissance commentators. In A Preparation to the Psalter (1619) George Wither remarks on the variety of modes:

> As the *Psalmes* are excellent in regard of the *Author* and *Matter* of them; so, are they also in respect of their *Forme*. For, they are in *Verse*, *& Verse* of sundry kinds; wherein there is also greater varietie of

> expression, then can be found in any one volume of *Poesie*, whether you have respect to the nature of the *Poesie*, as it is *Heroicall*, Tragicall, Lyricall, & such like; or, to his manner of setting forth those things he purposeth: which is sometime by way of complaint, some time petitionarily, some time in one fashion, and some time in another . . . . And, in my opinion, it addeth somewhat to their dignitie, that they doe by a sweete and extraordinary kind of speaking, seeke to ravish the mind with the love of God. (127)

As Patrick Miller has shown in a survey of the history of the Psalms, Reform theologians such as Calvin and Luther were taken by the spectrum of feeling and emotion in these poems. Calvin relates:

> I have been accustomed to call this, I think not inappropriately, "An Anatomy of All Parts of the Soul"; for there is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated. (qtd. in Miller 19)

Martin Luther sees in the Psalms the polarities of praise and lamentation:

> A human heart is like a ship on a wild sea, driven by the storm winds from the four corners of the world. Here it is struck with fear and worry because of impending disaster; there comes grief and sadness because of present evil. Here breathes a breeze of hope and of anticipated happiness; there blows security and joy in present blessings. These storm winds teach us to speak with earnestness, to open the heart and pour out what lies at the bottom of it. . . . What is the greatest thing in the Psalter but this earnest speaking amid these storms of every kind? Where does one find finer words of joy than in the psalms of praise and thanksgiving? There you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into fair and pleasant gardens, yes, as into heaven itself. There you see what fine and pleasant flowers of the heart spring up from all sorts of fair and happy thoughts toward God, because of his blessings. On the other hand, where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiful words of sadness than in the psalms of lamentation? There again you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into death, yes, as into hell itself. How gloomy and dark it is there, with all kinds of troubled forebodings about the wrath of God! (Preface to the Psalter 255-256. Also qtd. in Miller 19-20)

As Miller observes, "the psalms give speech to human response and human existence before God. . . . the psalms range through the gamut of *experiences* (disaster, war, sickness, exile celebration, marriage, birth, death) and *emotions* (joy, terror, reflections, gratitude, hate contentment, depression)" (19). It is clear, even from this short survey, that the Psalms were valued by the poets and theologians of Milton's period for providing both a form and a language for humanity in its most diverse, intimate, and prayerful moments.

Modern scholarship has paid great attention to the categories and classifications of the Psalms, recognizing their role in the liturgical rites of ancient Israel. Yet this kind of "form criticism" has itself been criticized for maintaining an idea of genre which is too fixed and rigid. Robert Alter argues:

> The most pervasive form-critical misconception about psalmodic genre is the notion that genre, apart from the occasional mixed type, is a fixed entity. This leaves the critic chiefly with the task of identifying formulaic sameness from one instance of the genre to the next. The evidence of literary history elsewhere and later suggests that, quite to the contrary, writers tend to be restive within the limits of genre, repeatedly find ways to juggle and transform generic conventions, formulaic or otherwise, and on occasion push genre beyond its own formal or thematic limits. We are likely to perceive the poetic richness of Psalms more finely if we realize that there is a good deal of such refashioning of genre in the collection, even when the recurrence of certain formulas tells us that a particular generic background is being invoked. ("Psalms" 247)

Notwithstanding the variety and flexibility present in the genres of the Psalms, a flexibility which in itself accommodates the transformation from despair to hope which is one of their recurrent themes, many students of the Psalms, and Alter himself, see two dominant categories in the anthology. For my purposes, I will use the terms suggested by Luther, as well as the modern scholar Claus Westermann, and call these categories praise and lamentation.

The Hebrew title of the anthology -- "Tehillim" -- literally means "praises" and suggests that praise is the more comprehensive purpose of the Psalms. With few exceptions, the most notable being the unrelieved complaint of psalm 88, we discover that the psalms of lamentation enact a verbal process which culminates in praise rather than contradicting it. Westermann's analysis of the lament structure illustrates this transformation. The stages, according to Westermann, are as follows:

Address (and introductory petition)

Lament

Turning toward God (confession of trust).

Petition

Vow of praise[8]

Milton works a similar transformation in Sonnet XIX, "On His Blindness," with the turning point occurring at the *volte* which inheres in the traditional structure of the sonnet. We should therefore not be surprised that Milton assimilates a similar shift in the classical principle of *peripeteia.*

If we consider the place of memory in the dialectic which informs the poem we find that praise and lamentation correspond to the two aspects of memory we encounter in Samson Agonistes and elsewhere in Milton's poetry. The dialectic of the "sinner and the created being" which Ricoeur finds in the Confessions of Augustine is a consistent feature of Milton's poems: while the sinners such as Samson are provoked to lament, creatures, like Adam and Eve in their morning orisons, are clearly formed to praise. Following the perceptions of dialectic which inform Ricoeur's biblical criticism, Walter Brueggemann extends the genres of lamentation and praise to patterns of disorientation and reorientation featured in the Psalms. Describing the movement from disorientation to reorientation, Brueggemann suggests that the "turn is a move beyond remembering. But it could not be done without the painful part of remembering. In the various Psalms of lament and in the various parts of these Psalms, the speaker is located at various places in the movement of living into and emerging out of disorientation" ("Psalms and the Life of Faith" 8). Again, the shift or transformation, which could conceivably have influenced Milton's modification of tragic reversal, encompasses the two aspects of remembering which are present in Samson Agonistes. For Samson, memory as disorientation and lamentation is based upon his breaking his covenant with God by divulging the secret of his strength. Thus the attempt at petition or prayer, rendered in the opening line in an allusion to the twenty-third psalm, is followed by a lengthy prologue of lamentation which involves a painful but realistic appraisal of his situation. Even so, the bitterness of memory as lamentation is a prelude to praise and reorientation because it necessarily entails a comparison of the lapsed self with the memory of the self as, in Augustine's terms, a created image of God. Yet the transformation or turning point is, as so many of the psalms illustrate, dependent upon God's reciprocal recollection of the individual. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which provides one of the paradigms of temporality for Samson Agonistes, the son's verbal reflections on the nadir of his fortunes can be read as a species of psalm lamentation, and thus as a prelude to his return and reorientation which fulfill the psalmic pattern.

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[8] This list is quoted verbatim from Praise and Lament in the Psalms ,170.

If we turn at this point to the psalms which Milton evokes and alludes to in Samson Agonistes, we discover that the distinctive features of Old Testament historic consciousness, as these are expressed through the power of memory in the Psalms, are integrated into the temporal dynamics of Milton's drama. These features include the centrality of covenant in historic memory; the contrast between the brevity and ephemerality of earthly existence and the steadfastness of God; and the relationship between the individual and the community or nation to which he belongs when it is viewed as an entity which endures through generations. Let us consider how Milton uses the Psalms to explore these issues in Samson Agonistes.

Old Testament scholars identify precursors of the Psalms in certain poetic passages of the Pentateuch as well as in the historic narratives which succeed it. The Song of Deborah in the fifth chapter of Judges, which exhorts Israel to remember Jael's slaying of Sisera, is one example. So too is the very brief prayer made by Samson in Judges 16:28 [9] :

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[9] Brevard Childs states that the "form of the plea within [Samson's prayer] is akin to that of the complaint psalm. Probably this common feature rests as much on an elemental quality of prayer as much as on the influence of a tradition" (Memory and Tradition in Ancient Israel 36).

> And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

The prayer in Samson Agonistes is silent, interior, and rendered from a distance through the memory of the Hebrew Messenger who tells us that Samson stood "as one who prayed." In the prayer in Judges 16:28, Samson asks to be remembered by God, an appeal which is consistent with those made in many of the complaint psalms, especially when the psalmist is in a position of danger. The psalm-like quality of Samson's prayer enhances his typological association with Christ whose cry from the cross -- "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" -- is the first line of Psalm 22, a psalm which is evoked in Samson Agonistes in the themes of danger, darkness and abandonment, and which contains a plea for deliverance. Similar appeals to be remembered by God echo through the Book of Job where they emphasize the ephemerality of earthly existence: "O remember that my life is wind" (Job: 7:7).

As a framework of historical reference, typology implies that the type must contain in individual experience the history of the nation. In the same way, the psalmist implies that a situation of danger, sickness or exile is analogous to the historic sufferings of Israel. In Paradise Regained, the forty days which the Son spends fasting in the wilderness prior to his temptation by Satan corresponds to the forty years which Israel spent wandering between Egypt and Canaan, for example. In Paradise Lost, Milton draws attention to the Hebrew origins of Jesus' latinized name -- "*Joshua* whom the Gentiles *Jesus* call" -- in order to identify him as the ultimate charismatic leader who retakes Paradise. Part of Samson's problem is his assumption that his status as charismatic champion allows him to transcend history, as if through a form of divine license, rather than containing it, yet his misfortunes clearly link him to the history of his people. Prodigality is to the individual as exile and wandering are to the nation. The pattern of apostasy and deliverance which is repeated throughout Judges corresponds to the structure of the psalms of lamentation.Brueggemann observes this correspondence in the four part "formula" which governs the Judges narrative:

> a. . . . the people of Israel did what was evil . . .
>
> b. Therefore the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel.
>
> c. But when the people of Israel *cried* to Yahweh,
>
> d. Yahweh raised up a deliverer (*mosi'a*) (Judg. 3:7-9).[10]

Here, as Brueggemannn has shown, it is the turn which is based upon a petition or "cry" which links this narrative structure to the psalms of lamentation. Generally, this is a pattern of reorientation after a time of disorientation, of remembrance after a time of forgetting.

Perhaps the clearest allusion to the Psalms in Samson Agonistes occurs in the second act when the Chorus exclaims:

> God of our Fathers, what is man!
> That thou towards him with hand so various,
> Or might I say contrarious,
> Temper'st thy providence through his short course,
> Not evenly, as thou rul'st
> Th'Angelic orders and inferior creatures mute,
> Irrational and brute. (667-673)

The Chorus complains of the vicissitudes of the earthly pilgrimage, which are intensified in those who are specially elected to perform some service, yet the allusion is to Psalm 8, a psalm which reflects upon the order and stability of creation:

> When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy
> fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast
> ordained;
> What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and
> the son of man, that thou visitest him?
> For thou hast made him a little lower than the
> angels, and hast crowned him with glory and
> honour.
> Thou madest him to have dominion over the works
> of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:
> All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;

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[10] Walter Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life," Interpretation 28 (1974), 14.

> The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and
> whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea.
> O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all
> the earth! (3-9)

With its sense of humanity's place in the scale of creation and the dominion it is granted over the lesser creatures, Psalm 8 recalls the creation narrative in the first chapter of Genesis. The Chorus in Samson Agonistes also recalls this in the extremes of "Th'Angelic orders and inferior creatures mute," yet it does so to register the shock of lost order and the irrationality of the Fall.

As Robert Alter has demonstrated, the Psalms appeal to God in the two aspects of his power: He is the God of creation or the cosmos and also the God of history (Biblical Poetry 121). These two aspects of God's power approximate the categories of space and time respectively. The division is reflected in Paradise Lost in the narratives of Raphael and Michael. While Raphael's narrative includes pre-creation history, it culminates in the event of creation and dwells on Adam's appointed place in a hierarchical cosmos which has not yet entered history. Michael's narrative, on the other hand, dwells upon time as it unfolds after Adam's position is lost.

In Samson Agonistes, God's power over nature and his power over history are not really distinguishable; creation itself is viewed as an historic and covenantal event which , because it illustrates God's power to act in history, makes history the primary category of dominion. Samson recalls the original *fiat lux* of creation during his lament for his blindness in the prologue (83-85). Samson's frame of reference is such that subsequent images of light are viewed as extensions of the original power and purpose of creation. These include the fiery ascent of the angel who announces his birth, and later the illumination of his "inward" eye at the pagan temple.

Manoa's memory of the fountain God raised to quench Samson's thirst characterizes the associative memory of Old Testament historic consciousness:

> But God who caus'd a fountain at thy prayer
> From the dry ground to spring, thy thirst to allay
> After the brunt of battle, can as easy

> Cause light again within thy eyes to spring,
> Wherewith to serve him better than thou hast. (581-585)

That future actions are portended by past ones is central to the conception of covenantal or saving history.[11] Miracles similar to the one told by Manoa are recounted in Psalm 114: 7-8 and Psalm 105:41-42:

> He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they
> ran in the dry places like a river.
> For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham
> his servant. (105: 41-42).

In both cases, the miracle is a part of an Exodus narrative, and God is thought of as being motivated by the memory of his covenant with Abraham. Yet the miracle in itself evokes the power of creation demonstrated in Genesis: producing water out of a desert is equivalent to producing light out of darkness, which is the link Manoa recognizes. Conception and childbirth also demonstrate God's power over nature, yet these events signal decisive interventions in history and are not manifestations of power for their own sake. Abraham's wife Sarah conceives Isaac in old age, and Samson's own mother is "barren" and childless when she conceives Samson. Similar miracles occur in the conceptions of John the Baptist and Christ. Yet the supernatural miracles are always part of a larger historic pattern. In Paradise Regained, when Satan tempts the Son to manifest his power over nature by supernaturally satisfying his hunger and thirst, he does so with the hope of neutralizing the Son's potential impact on fallen history.

Samson senses that his is -- or was to have been -- a unique moment in Israel's history. Yet, like the psalm poets, he conceives of his own deliverance, and Israel's, as an extension of the covenant which begins with Abraham and continues with the exodus led by Moses. Samson's God is the "God of Abraham," and he views Israel as a historic entity which endures through time from generation to generation. The continuity of individual identity through ancestry and progeny, and of collective identity through successive generations, involves two opposed "arguments" of time in *Samson Agonistes*. Renaissance meditations on the problem of immortality, expressed by Shakespeare in *Macbeth* and also in his sonnets as the need to counteract the destructive power of time through offspring, serves as one context for the debate. Psalm 127 says that "sons are a heritage from the Lord." Job's greatest disaster is the loss of his children, and Abraham's faith is tested in his willingness to sacrifice his child. Manoa has found the experience less than satisfactory:

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[11] Samson's "prayer, recorded in Judges 15:18, has been interpreted by Westermann as a precursor of the lament psalm. He regards it as a "self-contained supplication to God" which "requires no explicit petition since since a petition is already included in the lament itself" (Praise and Lament in the Psalms 171).

> I gain'd a Son,
> And such a Son as all Men hail'd me happy;
> Who would be now a Father in my stead? (353-355)

Yet his loyalty to Samson in the face of "contrarious" circumstances is part of what makes their father-son relationship an analogy of providential concern in the poem.

The theme of progeny and dynasty is an aspect of the contrast between the brevity of earthly existence on the one hand and the constancy of God on the other. Transience and permanence comprise two synergistic terms of reference in memory as it is explored in the Psalms. Manoa's fidelity to Samson is an analogy of divine constancy which, in Psalm 103, is expressed as a father-son relationship:

> Like as a father pitieth his children, so
> the Lord pitieth them that fear him.
> For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth
> that we are dust.
> As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower
> of the field, so he flourisheth.
> For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone;
> and the place thereof shall know it no more.
> But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting
> to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his
> righteousness unto children's children.
> To such as keep his covenant, and to those who
> remember his commandments to do them. (103:13-18)

This passage illustrates the sharp juxtaposition of human transience with eternity. It should be noted that the fifth verse of this psalm -- "so that thy youth is renewed as the eagle's" -- is one source for the eagle metaphor delivered by the semichorus at the close of Samson Agonistes, though the source most often cited is Isaiah 40:31. Radzinowicz also cites the ninth verse -- ""He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever" -- as the source of Manoa's observation that divine wrath is indeed not permanent, for "God will relent, and quit thee all his debt" (509) (Towards Samson Agonistes 373).

Robert Alter argues that the contrast between transience and permanence as it is conveyed in biblical poetry promotes a different ethic of heroic action from the same contrast in classical literature:

> The fleetingness of human life is of course a perception by no means limited to monotheistic or religious poetry, either in ancient literature or later, but the biblical poets deepened this recurrent human perception in a distinctive way by rendering the ephemerality and incompleteness of the life of man against the background of God's eternity. And since poetry . . . often works out meanings through an interplay of polarities, the brevity of human existence could also provide a certain imaginative access through contrast to the inconceivable timelessness of God. In the *Iliad*, the consciousness of life's brief span is the occasion for asserting a code of heroic action. In the Bible, where it is set against the consciousness of God's eternality, it becomes the occasion for a new kind of inwardness, one element of which is the recognition of the tenuousness, the dependence, the impotence of man's existence. (Biblical Poetry 125)

This assessment of biblical poetry not surprisingly touches Milton's deepest concerns as a poet. Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained both promote the "better fortitude" of patience which is, by definition, a posture of dependence based on faith, and do so at the expense of heroic codes which are, as the Son remarks to Satan, arguments of "Human weakness rather than of strength" (III:402). Only when Samson accepts his own weakness is he ready to act.

Harapha, the Philistine giant who is entirely Milton's invention, serves to illustrate the codes of action which distinguish cultures in his encounter with Samson. Harapha clearly succeeds in rattling Samson's hard-learned patience, and were it not for Harapha's wavering Samson would indeed have entered into another futile exercise. The encounter demonstrates Samson's imperfect understanding of providential purpose, yet he manages to profess the sense of dependency which is the hallmark of patience:

> I know no spells, use no forbidden Arts;
> My trust is in the living God who gave me
> At my Nativity this strength, diffius'd
> No less through all my sinews, joints and bones,
> Than thine, while I preserv'd these locks unshorn,
> The pledge of my unviolated vow. (1139-1144)

Harapha's formal introduction of himself resembles the introductions which often precede armed combat in epics and romances. Indeed, his boasting is a form of "rodomontade," a term derived from the name of the Saracen military leader in Ariosto's Orlando Furioso. Samson, whose past exploits "made arms ridiculous," offers to meet Harapha armed only with an oaken staff, an offer which Harapha sees as an insult to weaponry:

> Thou durst not thus disparage glorious arms
> Which greatest Heroes have in battle worn,
> Thir ornament and safety. (1130-1132)

Milton shares some of Ariosto's satiric purpose in creating Harapha's gorgeous paraphernalia. In his introduction, Harapha boasts that he comes from an illustrious line of giants:

> I am of *Gath*;
> Men call me Harapha, of stock renown'd
> As *Og* or *Anak* and the *Emims* old
> That *Kiriathaim* held: Thou knowst me now
> If thou at all art known. (1078-1082)

Samson, on the other hand, offers his idea of lineage by tracing his strength to his nativity. When Harapha departs, Samson remarks that he is rumored to be the "Father of five Sons/ All of Gigantic size, *Goliah* chief" (1248-1249). The invention of Harapha's lineage intensifies the typological links between Samson and Christ if the reader recalls that Goliath was defeated by David (using the meanest of weapons), that David was traditionally thought to be the author of the Psalms, and that Christ was born "of the House of David."

Dalila comes to view her relationship with Samson as an exploit and conquest, and consoles herself, seeing that he is "implacable, more deaf/ To prayers, than winds and seas" (961-962), with the prospect of fame or earthly memory. Her presence raises in Samson that side of memory which is bitter, remorseful, and recriminating, producing one of the most terrible moments in the poem:

> *Dalila*. Let me approach at least, and touch thy hand.
>
> *Samson*. Not for thy life, lest fierce remembrance wake
> My sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint.
> At distance I forgive thee, go with that;
> Bewail thy falsehood, and the pious works
> It hath brought forth to make thee memorable
> Among illustrious women, faithful wives:
> Cherish thy hast'n'd widowhood with the gold
> Of Matrimonial treason: so farewell. (951-959)

Realizing that Samson's verdict will be the verdict of Israel in posterity, Dalila reflects upon the double nature of fame itself:

> Fame if not double-fac't is double mouth'd,
> And with contrary blast proclaims most deeds;
> On both his wings, one black, the other white,
> Bears greatest names in his wild aery flight.
> My name perhaps among the Circumcis'd
> In *Dan*, in *Judah*, and the bordering Tribes,
> To all posterity may stand defam'd,
> With malediction mention'd, and the blot
> Of falsehood most unconjugal traduc't.
> But in my country where I most desire,
> In *Ekron, Gaza, Asdod*, and in *Gath*
> I shall be nam'd among the famousest
> Of Women, sung at solemn festivals,
> Living and dead recorded, who to save
> Her country from a fierce destroyer, chose
> above the faith of wedlock bands, my tomb
> With odours visited and annual flowers. (971-987).

She is correct to complain of the subjectivity and partisanship of historical writing. When fame becomes a motive for action, however, then the action belongs to the ethic of heroism Milton attacks in his major poems. The image she creates of herself as a venerated cult figure can be linked to the idolatry which her culture represents in the poem. Samson, on the other hand, is capable of meaningful action only because his own capacity for self-worship has been devastated.

The strong visual imagery associated with the Philistine characters in the poem, as opposed to the presentation of the Hebrew characters primarily as voices, develops the distinction between Philistine idolatry on the one hand and the Hebrew God who speaks his purpose into being on the other. The Chorus' description of Dalila in her entrance is strikingly visual:

> But who is this, what thing of Sea or Land?
> Female of sex it seems,
> Comes this way sailing
> Like a stately Ship
> Of *Tarsus*, bound for th'Isles
> Of *Javan* or *Gadire*
> With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,
> Sails fill'd, and streamers waving,
> Courted by all the winds that hold them play,
> An Amber scent of odorous perfume
> Her harbinger, a damsel train behind;
> Some rich *Philistian* Matron she may; seem,
> And now at nearer view, no other certain
> Than Dalila thy wife. (710-724)

In the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce Milton uses shipwreck imagery to describe the strain imposed by the prolongation of an unfortunate marriage: "when human frailty surcharged is at such a loss, charity ought to venture much and use bold physic, lest an overtossed faith endanger to shipwreck" (Hughes, 710). When Dalila leaves, the Chorus observes: "What Pilot so expert but needs must wreck/ Embark'd with such a Steers-mate at the Helm" (1044-1045). In marrying Samson and Dalila, Milton makes a significant addition to the Judges narrative. Firstly, by marrying Samson and Dalila, Milton confers on their relationship the status of a covenant, thereby making it comparable to the "promise" of Samson's nativity which is the first focal point of Samson's memory, his marriage to Dalila being the second. Secondly, the covenant between God and Abraham which is a center of gravity in the "national" memory of the

Chorus is often conveyed, especially in the prophetic texts of the Old Testament, in the symbolism of marriage.

The ship imagery which the Chorus uses to describe Dalila represents the power of their collective memory in operation. The description clearly draws upon Psalm 48:

> Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in
> the city of our God, in the mountain of his
> holiness.
> Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth,
> is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of
> the great King.
> God is known in her palaces for a refuge.
> For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by
> together.
> They saw it, and so they marveled; they were
> troubled, and hasted away.
> Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of
> a woman in travail.
> Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east
> wind.
> As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of
> the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God: God will
> establish it forever. (48:1-8)

The psalm celebrates the establishment of the "city of the Lord of hosts," and recollects the deliverance from the threat posed by an invading naval force. Milton identifies Tarshish, a city of uncertain location, though probably in the western Mediterranean, with Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and so fixes the origin of the invasion in the west, perhaps to remind us that the Philistines also were an invading sea people from the west. Alter sees the sea battle in Psalm 48 as "an unspecified point in the past, within which is recessed the memory of a more distant and archetypal past, since the report of the naval victory uses language alluding to the drowning of the Egyptians as it is described in the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15)" ("Psalms" 257). The association of the defeat of the Ships of Tarshish with the drowning of Pharaoh's cavalry in Exodus shows that the psalmist views, in memory, the succession of divine saving actions as an extension of the original "promise" or covenant between God and Israel.

The trajectory of temporal references in Psalm 48 aligns the Exodus and the victory over the Ships of Tarshish with the foundation of the eternal city of God which is Jerusalem. Milton's use of Psalm 48 therefore does more than remind us of the "shipwreck" of a failed marriage: it aligns the Judges narrative, and certainly Milton's recreation and interpretation of it, with the movement of providential history. In Alter's analysis, this movement culminates in the foundation of the city which is a "nexus for all imagined space and time" (Biblical Poetry 124). Milton's poems never offer a vision of such a city. Instead, they build upon the temple of the upright heart and cultivate the paradise within. This should modify our understanding of the way in which the Chorus' description of Dalila allows the temporal trajectory of Psalm 48 to become a significant dimension of the dialogue between the Chorus and Samson. The Epistle to the Hebrews concludes by stating: "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (13:14). This central aphorism in the puritan perception of history, reflected, for example, in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, is refined by Milton into an elementary vision of community at the close of his major poems. Adam and Eve join hands as they leave Eden. Jesus returns home to his mother's house. The Chorus of Danites is dismissed with a new understanding of the ways of God. Without the stability of a continuing city, Milton portrays the strengthening of the most fundamental human relationships in a pattern of dialogue, instruction, understanding and commitment which emerges from the motion of the temporal journey.

IV: THE PROPHET'S MOMENT

By favoring the concept of an "elder state" or temporal dimension prior to the creation of the world or, as Raphael, puts it, by placing time "in eternity," Milton is able to construct a narrative of pre-creation history which, even allowing for the technique of accommodation which Raphael adopts (a technique which itself implies the displacement of the eternal moment into the sequentiality of time), assumes its definition from those decisive events which assert divine power over history. Hence in the "pre-historical" realm of Eden before the Fall, Raphael's narrative of the War in Heaven and the Creation establishes in Adam's memory a record of divine power over history and nature, time and space, in order to strengthen him against future temptations. The same kind of memory is demonstrated in the Psalms, many of which identify the power of creation in Genesis with the narrative of deliverance in Exodus in order to reaffirm the covenantal relationship between God and Israel in the mind of the individual or the community, thereby transforming periods of lamentation into periods of praise.

The structural affinity between Samson Agonistes and those Psalms which portray the transformation of lamentation into praise, together with the density of psalmic allusion in the poem, is central to Milton's recreation and interpretation of Hebrew historic consciousness on the basis of his Old Testament sources. While the personal and reflective mode of particular psalms informs the dramatic quality of Samson Agonistes, the Psalms must also be viewed in their seminal position in the biblical canon, for in drawing heavily on the Psalms, Milton evaluates the links between history and prophecy which the Psalms project in order to orient his drama in the larger patterns of history which the Bible authorizes. Just as the Psalms of Lamentation are anticipated structurally by the narrator of Judges 2:11-19 , a passage which articulates an apparently pessimistic yet ultimately transformative pattern of history in the source narrative of Samson Agonistes, as well as dramatically in Samson's cryptic prayer in Judges 16:28, so too do the specific psalms Milton alludes to anticipate and perhaps influence the writings of the major and minor prophets, not to mention the gospels and epistles of the New Testament where psalmic allusion is also frequent (that Christ accepted the Psalms as prophecies of his advent is clear in Luke 24:44). Just as the day which Adam and Raphael spend contemplating eternity in an as yet "timeless" Eden achieves, through Raphael's narrative, a scope which extends from Genesis to Revelation, so too does the confined and circumscribed day of Samson Agonistes, set at the nadir of fallen history, achieve a comparable if qualified vantage point (lacking the framing power of an authoritative narrator or sub-narrators) by drawing upon the range of biblical literature, from narrative to poetry to prophecy, each with its own characteristic preoccupation with the nature of time and history. At the risk of simplifying this complex set of references, we could say that the Psalms orient the present in the past by portraying the reciprocity of divine and human memories in a confirmation of covenantal relationship based upon a unique bond between creator and creature. Prophecy orients the present in the future, an orientation already latent in the action of memory, and thereby comprehends the distinct tenses of time in a consolidated, prophetic moment. How Milton achieves this prophetic function in Samson Agonistes is the subject of this chapter.

As with the dimensions of biblical historical narrative and psalmody, which occur as allusive kernels in the speeches of the Hebrew characters, prophecy can be found in microcosmic forms which illuminate its function in the drama as a whole. In the dialogue between Samson and Manoa, for example, Samson interprets his apparent exclusion from history as the just consequence of his mistakes:

> This only hope relieves me, that the strife
> With mee hath end; all the contest is now
> 'Twixt God and *Dagon* (460-462)

The poem eventually defeats Samson's own logic, for exclusion from history is not possible without limiting God's power to act or, as the Chorus observes, confining "th'Interminable" (307). Samson's distillation of the underlying dramatic conflict to a contest between God and Dagon immediately precipitates an expression of confidence in God's sovereignty:

> *Dagon* hath presum'd,
> Mee overthrown, to enter lists with God,
> His Deity comparing and preferring
> Before the God of *Abraham*. He, be sure,
> Will not connive, or linger, thus provok'd,
> But will arise and his great name assert:
> *Dagon* must stoop, and shall ere long receive
> Such a discomfit, as shall quite despoil him
> Of all these boasted Trophies won on me,
> And with confusion blank his Worshippers. (462-471)

Manoa responds by calling Samson's expression a "Prophecy":

> With cause this hope relieves thee, and these words
> I as a Prophecy receive: for God
> Nothing more certain, will not long defer
> To vindicate the glory of his name
> Against all competition, nor will long
> Endure it, doubtful whether God be Lord,
> Or Dagon. (472-478)

In declaring this expression of faith a prophecy, Manoa accepts its premise of Samson's exclusion from history. Yet Samson's own revival is implicit in the prophecy. Like Raphael's narrative at the centre of Paradise Lost, which juxtaposes the conflict of the War in Heaven with the creation of the world, Samson's "prophecy" juxtaposes conflict and creation by predicting God's victory over Dagon in a speech which transcends the speaker's own near-despair. The creation which is aligned with the conflict between God and Dagon involves Samson's shift from resignation to anticipation: "With cause this hope revives thee." Revivification is analogous to the "raising up" of charismatic leaders at moments of historic crisis in Judges. Similarly in the Psalms, the psalmist dramatizes the revival of personal hope through the memory and expectation of God acting on behalf of Israel. The revival of Samson's hopes is as central to the prophetic nature of his statement to Manoa as its prediction of God's victory over Dagon, for the phenomenon of revived hope prefigures the general restoration of the divine image which is the goal of a providential, redemptive history.

Samson Agonistes clearly sustains the elements of continuity between Judges and the Psalms as well as the affinities between psalmody and prophecy. We should also note the essential differences between the Psalms and the Prophets in order to clarify the different roles these influences play in Milton's drama. Robert Alter's description of the meditations on time and eternity in the Psalms as providing the "occasion for a new kind of inwardness, one element of which is a recognition of the tenuousness, the dependence, the impotence of man's existence" (Biblical Poetry 125) is, as has already been noted, equally and eloquently applicable to Milton's purpose as a poet. Prophetic poetry can be viewed as an extension and development of this purpose, but with this decisive contrast: whereas psalmic poetry is often addressed to God and explores the inner condition of the poet in terms of his relationship with God, prophetic poetry shifts deliberately from private to public utterance. As Alter notes, the psalmist "through the act of poetry probes his own nature or comes to see more clearly the world around him or the pattern of history or the moral character of man. Prophetic poetry, in contrast to all these cases, is devised as a form of direct address to a historically real audience" (Biblical Poetry 140). The contrast between private and public expression bears in turn upon the distinction between free will which personal discourse reflects and divine guidance to which free will is either subordinated or amalgamated in inspired, prophetic discourse. This latter distinction is a characteristic ethical tension throughout Milton's work.

Alter's distinction expands upon the fundamental dialectical tensions which inform Samson Agonistes, for the tension between the private, inner person and the public, outer person is basic to Samson's frustrated sense of identity. As readers, we are privy to the private, tormented meditations in the prologue even as we are impressed by Samson's burdensome sense of vocation to a public office and mission. Samson dwells on this when he answers Harapha's charge that he is a "league-breaker" in a passage based on Judges 15:8:

> But I a private person, whom my country
> As a league-breaker gave up bound, presum'd
> Single Rebellion and did Hostile Acts.
> I was no private but a person rais'd
> With strength sufficient and command from Heav'n
> To free my Country. (1208-1213)

The tension between the private and the public person focuses here on the ethics of Samson's actions in both their timing and value. He declares in these lines that the public role of deliverer should subsume the private person, yet it is clearly the inconsistencies of the private person that have undermined his public stature.

Judgment upon Samson, both moral and critical, depends ultimately upon the meaning of the catastrophe at the pillars. In the Messenger's narrative, which is the verbal account of the catastrophe, Milton carefully re-establishes the private-public tension by portraying Samson in the modes of inward, psalmic prayer and outward, prophetic utterance in the moments which precede his last, fatal action. The Messenger tells us that Samson "stood as one who prayed," implying the interior quest for orientation in a providential design which characterizes the Psalms. This silent quest is followed by the spoken, public declaration:

> "Hitherto, Lords, what your commands impos'd
> I have perform'd, as reason was, obeying,
> Not without wonder or delight beheld.
> Now of my own accord such other trial
> I mean to show you of my strength, yet greater;
> As with amaze shall strike all who behold." (1640-1645)

This transition from silence to speech, from prayer to proclamation, as it is rendered in the Messenger's narrative, focuses the relationship between psalmody and prophecy in the drama, and manifests the irony of the "hidden" presence of God in events. Indeed, the progression from the psalmic prayer to prophetic utterance, illustrated in microcosm in this transition, is observable in the outlines of the entire poem which begins with the private, interior prologue and ends with a figure in a public forum where his words and actions are given into the hands of witnesses to interpret and transmit. The heavily ironic prediction in Samson's final line functions as the prospective anticipation of an outcome already known to the reader. Yet it is related and recovered retrospectively in the memory of the Messenger whose narrative, while it is not a poetic or psalmic paraphrase, demonstrates the psalmist's method of inscribing providential actions in memory.[1]

The status of Samson as a type of prophet, which these statements imply, raises important questions which define and qualify the role of prophecy in the poem. Samson is by no means an Isaiah or a Jeremiah, and it would not even occur to many critics to suggest that he is a type of prophet. Nor would it occur to many to recognize him as a nascent psalm poet. Nevertheless, significant traces of this movement exist in his speeches (this does not mean that Samson could have gone on to write the Psalms: it means that the Psalms and the Prophets are the voice of a people extending through time, a phenomenon which the Christian Epic can emulate). In his study of prophecy as a key to theories of inspiration in Milton's era, William Kerrigan selects Samson Agonistes for special attention precisely because it lacks a prophet:

> I choose this work, less understood than Paradise Lost, in part because the drama seems to represent the negative case. No prophet introduces Samson Agonistes, no prophet dramatizes the course of his inspiring. I am interested, then, in the implications of this apparent absence. With

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[1] Note that the Messenger's first line -- "O wither shall I run, or which way fly" (1541) -- alludes to Psalm 139, verse 7, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" Milton incorporates allusions to the same psalm into a speech of Samson's (see p. 138). Even the title of Messenger, while it is a convention of Greek tragedy, conveys the dimension of prophecy through its sense of witness. Milton seeks to strongly link the role of the Messenger ot the role of Samson himself, especially as the witness of language or words succeeds the witness of actions or deeds.

> no prophetic narrator, the language establishes a kind of prophetic authority between itself and the reader. (11)

As Kerrigan rightly observes, the language of the drama, part of which involves the role of biblical allusion in orienting the drama in the prophetic perception of history, attains a prophetic authority. Yet the comparison to Paradise Lost invites the question of what relation, if any, Samson's sense of vocation bears to that of Milton who links poetry and prophecy through the inspired narrator of Paradise Lost as well as through the roles of Raphael and Michael, the subordinate narrators whose element in the epic is words rather than actions (though Michael does lead an army against Satan's legions according to Raphael's narrative). The common issue in the exploration of vocation Milton undertakes in his major poems is the problem of correspondence between the inner and the outer person. This problem is reflected in the Son's tentative contemplation of his identity in Paradise Regained which includes discovering the ordained moment of transition from private to public life:

> I knew the time
> Now full, that I no more should live obscure,
> But openly begin, as best becomes
> The Authority which I derived from Heaven. (I:286-289)

This problem also explains the prominence of autobiographical reflection in Milton's prose treatises wherein he considers the need of the epic poet to be a "true poem" along with the nature and disposition of a "fit" audience. An examination of selections from Milton's prose tracts will clarify his conception of the prophet's role.

Milton provides a definition of the office of prophet in the Christian Doctrine in the course of a discussion of the various aspects of ministry in the "visible" church":

> EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS are sent and inspired by God to set up or to reform the church both by preaching and by writing. To this class the prophets, apostles and evangelists and others of that kind belonged. (YP:570)

Prophecy, teaching and preaching can be separately defined, yet Milton clearly sees them as interinvolved and to some extent identical rather than discrete. Hence his most explicit definition of prophecy emphasizes its purpose of public teaching:

> . . . the term *prophet* is applied not only to a man able to foretell the future but also to anyone endowed with exceptional piety and wisdom for the purpose of teaching: Gen. xx.7, of Abraham, *he is a prophet, and when he prays for you you shall live*. Similarly Miriam is called a prophetess, Exod. xv. 20, and so is Deborah, Judges iv.4, and all believers, Psal. cv.15: *do not touch my anointed, and do no harm to my prophets*. Thus under the gospel the simple gift of teaching, especially of public teaching, is called prophecy. (YP:572)

In the overall structure of the Christian Doctrine, this definition of prophecy follows those chapters which deal, in Milton's words, "with vocation and its consequences, whether these constitute mere alteration, or whether they are regeneration and the growth of the regenerate man" (YP:563). This direction could be taken to reflect Milton's sense of the relation between the private and the public person since the discussion of public service in the context of a social structure is predicated on a theology of the inner restoration of the divine image in each individual.

The progression from individual freedom to the freedom of the community, reflected in part by the progression from psalmic to prophetic utterance in Samson Agonistes, is explored further in the prose writings in the self-constructive and self-evaluative position Milton adopts in relation to his audience as he acknowledges the difficulty of presuming to teach an entire nation about freedom, especially at an early age. As early as the Seventh Prolusion, Milton raises the issue of intellectual and artistic immaturity and establishes the conflict between seizing an occasion and deferring composition, a conflict which he spent his lifetime reconciling:

> For I have learned from books and sayings of the most learnedthat nothing common or mediocre can be tolerated in an orator, or in a poet, and that anyone who wishes to be a true orator and to be recognized as one must be equipped with a solid foundation: he must have learned and digested all the arts and sciences. Since I am too young to have done this so far, I have chosen rather to build up that foundation in myself, to struggle by long and strenuous study for true recognition, than to snatch false praise with a hasty and premature style of writing. (Patrick 14)

A similar apology is found in the Reason of Church Government, in which Milton professes to write "while green years are upon my head" and "out of mine own season when I have neither yet completed to my mind the full circle of my private studies" (Hughes 667). These professions provide an analogy to Samson's sense of the disparity between physical as opposed to intellectual strength and wisdom. While political occasions provided an immediate summons for the prose tracts, the epics written in the final stage of Milton's career, the final tests of his sense of virtue and vocation, depended upon no particular provocation. Hence the timing of their composition provides another dimension, and perhaps a final refinement, of the ethic of patience which they explore.

Milton's account of his motives as a writer in the preamble to Book II of the Reason of Church Government develops his conception of the prophetic office which in turn forms the basis of his relationship with his audience. Countering the notion that he writes to enhance his personal reputation in a display of literary artifice, he reiterates his sense of unpreparedness and argues that prophecy is far more of a burden than a pleasure, for the prophet "cannot but sustain a sorer burden of mind, and more pressing, than any supportable toil or weight which the body can labour under, how and in what manner he shall dispose and employ those sums of knowledge and illumination which God hath sent him into this world to trade with" (Hughes 665). Prophets discover "in the discharge of their commission that they are made the greatest variance and offence, a very sword and fire both in house and city over the whole earth" (665). Milton illustrates this contention with biblical and classical examples:

> And although divine inspiration must certainly have been sweet to those ancient prophets, yet the irksomeness of that truth which they brought was so unpleasant to them that everywhere they call it a burden. Yea, that mysterious book of revelation which the great evangelist was bid to eat, as it had been some eye-brightening electuary of knowledge and foresight, though it were sweet in his mouth and in the learning, it was bitter in his belly, bitter in the denouncing. Nor was this hid from the wise poet Sophocles, who in that place of his tragedy where Tiresias is called to resolve King Oedipus in a manner which he knew would be grievous, brings him in bemoaning his lot, that he knew more than other men. For surely to every good and peaceable man it must in nature needs be a hateful thing to be the displeaser and ,molester of thousands; much better would it like him doubtless to be the messenger of gladness

> and contentment, which is his chief intended business to all mankind, but that they resist and oppose their own happiness. But when God commands to take the trumpet and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast, it lies not in man's will what he shall say or what he shall conceal. (Hughes 665-666)

The balancing of classical and biblical examples continues in the survey of genres which succeeds Milton's distinction between poetry and the "cool element" of prose. The survey of genres does not call attention to Milton's artistic potential so much as it does to another aspect of prophetic writing: the intensity of its nationalistic and patriotic motives:

> . . . I applied myself to that resolution which Ariosto followed against the persuasions of Bembo, to fix all the industry and art I could unite to the adorning of my native tongue; not to make verbal curiosities the end, that were a toilsome vanity, but to be an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things among mine own citizens throughout this Island in the mother dialect. (Hughes 668)

Following his discussion of genre, Milton reaffirms the priority of inspiration over artifice in his choice of genre:

> Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted,as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapors of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist, or the trencher fury of some riming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases. (Hughes 671)

This passage anticipates the expression of the theory of prophetic inspiration in the major poems, not only in its sense of invocation as prayer and in its anxiety over the buried talent, but also in its distinction between speech purified by fire and speech released by the "vapors of wine."

The distinction between speech purified by fire and speech released by the "vapors of wine" also looks forward to the contrast between Samson's prophetic composure at the pillars and the Philistine frenzy. And the "seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar," while clearly a reference to the sixth chapter of Isaiah, a source which also figures in the proem to the "Nativity Ode," also compares to the angel of Samson's nativity who descends and reascends from a "fiery altar" with his prophetic message. Apart from the influence of prophecy on genre, which is a distinct topic, and the presence of image patterns derived from the Prophets in the poem, we might ask again if we should recognize an element of prophetic stature in the figure of Samson. Kerrigan, who cites Samson Agonistes as the "negative case" with respect to prophecy because of the absence of an inspired narrator, locates Samson on the lowest level of Thomas Aquinas' categories of prophetic inspiration:

> Since prophecy is, as a mode of knowing, antagonistic to passion, the superior prophet receives his visions through the intellect and not through the imagination. On this basis Moses was a greater prophet than David, although David admittedly spoke more of the future. . . . On this basis Samson, moved to passionate action, exemplifies the lowest grade of prophetic inspiration: "Now knowledge is more proper to prophecy than is action; wherefore the lowest degree of prophecy is when a man, by an inward instinct, is moved to perform an outward action. Thus it is related of Samson that 'the Spirit of the Lord came strongly upon him, and as the flax is wont to be consumed at the approach of fire, so the bands with which he was bound were broken and loosed.'" (90-91)

While David is only briefly invoked in Samson's reference to Goliath, the son of Harapha, he functions importantly as a prophetic figure who effected the transition from action to writing, as well as a typological and dynastic link to Christ. Even though Samson is more noted for his deeds than for his words, attention to the language Milton uses in his recreation of the Old Testament figure yields a greater understanding of his uniquely prophetic role. Daniel Lochman, in a study which contrasts the verbal riddle of the lion and the honey with genuine prophecy, argues convincingly for the prophetic significance of Samson's words and actions as Milton conveys them in tragic form. Recalling Milton's expression of the burden of prophecy in the Reason of Church Government, Lochman argues that "the prophet's mixed pleasure and pain is precisely Samson's, whose internal suffering is manifest in the external, physical symbol of destruction. The buzzing "thoughts" provoke the hero to repentance - to painful self-exploration and condemnation - from which emerges the prophet nascent in word, apocalyptically figurative in deed" (212). While the destruction of idols is a symbolic reassertion of dignity, this emphasis on the emergence of a latent verbal power is consistent with my reading of the poem. The marshalling of prophetic images and motifs in Samson's diction constitutes Milton's technique of orienting the drama in the more comprehensive patterns of providential history which he derived from the Bible. The task of orientation in turn adumbrates the patterns for the "knowing reader" even as it "surmounts" the reach of the Chorus which functions in part as the reader's surrogate.

If the destruction of the temple were only the outward manifestation of Samson's inward sufferings then the apocalyptic prefiguration Lochman describes would be the by-product of a private vendetta. This is certainly implied in the Judges narrative, but the composure which Milton's Samson demonstrates at the pillars, as an epiphany of divinely created human dignity in the context of degradation, is typically juxtaposed to, and integrated with, the destructive catastrophe. Again, this kind of juxtaposition characterizes Milton's approach to prophecy as early as the "Nativity Ode," which presents patterns of concord and discord, creation and destruction, peace and war. Indeed, this juxtaposition can be taken as a defining feature of Milton's treatment of prophecy. The "Nativity Ode" identifies the awakening of Milton's sense of vocation as a poet-prophet (assisted, as in Samson Agonistes, by the metaphoric value of a circumscribed diurnal time frame) with the Incarnation which, as the fulfilment of prophecy at the centre of history, authorizes and defines his vocation. But the fulfilment of prophecy typically brings both peace and a sword as the release of creative power which attends the conference of identity and vocation, like the parenthesis of calm which marks the event of the Nativity, is succeeded (as is also the case in Samson Agonistes) by the destruction of pagan idols. Samson is not a poet, yet in reading the "Nativity Ode" as a gloss on Samson Agonistes we can perceive an important application of Milton's ideas of prophecy and vocation to Samson, for the

Ode portrays the awakening of the human mind to its own charismatic powers in an act of creation and its emancipation from idols which weaken those powers in an act of destruction.

The preamble to the Reason of Church Government also presents the juxtaposition of concord and discord by contemplating the relation between the prophet whose ideal message according to "God's prime intention" is peace and the turmoil of the unique historic moment in which he finds himself. The centrality of the Incarnation in the "Nativity Ode" implies that history and prophecy are united in a typological nexus. This relationship is prefigured in the succession of "just" men whose advents set the boundaries of the tumultuous historical epochs described by Michael in Books XI-XII of Paradise Lost. Here Milton follows the scheme elaborated by Augustine in the City of God and summarized in its final paragraphs:

> Now if the epochs of history are reckoned as 'days', followingthe apparent temporal scheme of scripture, this Sabbath period will emerge more clearly as the seventh of these epochs. The first 'day' is the first period, from Adam to the Flood; the second from the flood to Abraham. Those correspond not by equality in the passage of time, but in respect of the number of generations, for there are found to be ten generations in each of these periods. From that time, in the scheme of the evangelist Matthew, there are three epochs, which take us down to the coming of Christ; one from Abraham to David, a second from David to the Exile in Babylon, and the third extending to the coming of Christ in the flesh. Thus we have a total of five periods. We are now in the sixth epoch, but that cannot be measured by the number of generations, because it is said, 'It is not for you to know the dates: the Father has decided this by his own authority.' After this present age God will rest, as it were on the seventh day, and he will cause us, who are the seventh day, to find our rest in him. (XXII:30)

Samson is not included in the catalogue of just men. In fact, Milton uses Samson's shorn locks as a metaphor for the virtue lost by Adam and Eve at the Fall:

> So rose the *Danite* strong
> *Herculean Samson* from the Harlot-lap
> Of *Philistean Dalilah*, and wak'd
> Shorn of his strength, They destitute and bare

Of all thir virtue. (IX:1059-1063)[2]

Yet David was also notable for his moral failings. What Milton does find in Samson is a figure whose position in history is analogous to the reader's especially as it is oriented in the indefinite period between the Incarnation and the Apocalypse as described by Augustine. Samson does not mark the beginning or the end of an era: his "middle" position between the idealized eras of Joshua and David is analogous to the reader's position between the Incarnation and the Apocalypse, or more generally between the act of creation which precedes history and the act of recreation which redeems and fulfills history. At the beginning of Book XII of Paradise Lost, Michael is said to pause in his narrative "Betwixt the world destroy'd and the world restor'd" (XII:3).[3] Our position, like Samson's, is in such a pause.

Notwithstanding the consistent link between poetry and prophecy in Milton's canon, all three of the major poems end on notes of incompleteness. All three endings defer the apocalyptic expectations they arouse and strongly prefigure in favour of a deferral to history which reorients the reader in the historic moment in which the poems are read. In Areopagitica, Milton envisions a nation in which "not only our sev'nty Elders, but all the Lords people are become Prophets" (Hughes 744). The release of the latent power of prophecy is compared to the revived Samson: "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks" (744). Favouring a date of composition late in Milton's career, Mary-Ann Radzinowicz views Samson Agonistes as a response to England's failure to reform itself into a nation of prophets, a failure which links Milton's personal political experience schematically to England, to Samson, and to the nature of classical tragedy:

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[2] The pronoun "They" in l. 1062 means that *both* Adam and Eve are compared to Samson rather than Adam to Samson and Eve to Dalila.

[3] Michael's pause is also compared to a noon hour rest on a journey, which is precisely the context in which Samson Agonistes begins.

> Samson . . . experienced a terrible discrepancy between the deeds he performed and the effects he intended, for him also resulting in blindness and failure. The English people experienced a profound discrepancy between their achieved Restoration and their promised Revolution. The Greek tragedians experienced a similar discrepancy between the effects of the relationships of men and their expectations in entering into those relationships. (Towards Samson Agonistes 3)

One response to this perceived discrepancy is to relocate the prophetic impulse in the mind of the "fit" reader where the temporal patterns explored in the major poems can define, support and illuminate individual experience. Hence while the "fit" reader may need to be schooled in the conventions of the genres Milton uses, such a reader may also, like the nation, possess a latent prophetic power the concern for which is reflected in Milton's revaluation of genres and conventions. The text fulfills the conception of the prophet's role outlined in the Christian Doctrine by serving as a focal point for learning and edification based upon biblical narratives which define the shared experience of a community divided by its capacity for uncertainty.

Revival, awakening, and the release of latent creative power are all summarized in the invocation to Paradise Lost which returns to the idea of Nativity in the image of the Holy Spirit impregnating the cosmos. As a term which comprehends the functions of conception, creation and nurturing, nativity here is an object of prophetic contemplation as well as a metaphor for prophetic inspiration. Samson's rebirth is conveyed in the image of the "self-begott'n" phoenix in the lyrical speech of the semi-chorus:

> From out her ashy womb now teem'd
> Revives, reflourishes, then vigorous most
> When most unactive deem'd,
> And though her body die, her fame survives,
> A secular bird, ages of lives. (1703-1707)

As a winged creature reborn out of fire, the phoenix revives the memory of Samson's nativity, in which an angelic, prophetic messenger ascends "from off a fiery altar," in the present moment of action, thereby implying the fulfilment of the nativity prophecy.

The predictions made at Samson's birth lead to his obsession with himself as the object rather than the subject of prophecy, and as the reader is aware, the annunciation narrative is among the strongest typological affinities between Samson and Christ. Yet Samson's reiterations of trust in the promise of his nativity, when made in public in the context of his conflict with the Philistines, function as prophecies in the drama. An important example of this occurs in Samson's encounter with Harapha as Samson counters Harapha's charge that his strength depends upon magic and sorcery:

> I know no spells, use no forbidden Arts;
> My trust is in the living God who gave me
> At my Nativity this strength, diffius'd
> No less through all my sinews, joints and bones,
> Than thine, while I preserv'd these locks unshorn,
> The pledge of my unviolated vow. (1139-1144)

These lines are the occasion of another cryptic yet highly significant psalmic allusion which opens the temporal horizon of the episode to the Incarnation if read in light of the prophetic and typological interpretations of the Psalms which were available to Milton. This allusion deserves detailed consideration since it is a striking example of how allusion generally serves to clarify the relation between prophecy and typology in the poem.

Firstly, to reiterate the theory of biblical allusion in Milton's poetry, let us consider MacCallum's observation that the time of Samson is "a precursor to the great age of the Psalms" ("The Deliverer as Judge" 265). Milton succeeds, MacCallum argues, "in using allusion, echo, image and theme to place Samson in a world like that of the Psalms" (265). The use of "allusion, echo or image" in place of sustained, direct quotations is appropriate to Samson's historic position between the covenants made with Abraham and Moses and the age of the Psalms and the prophets, for it implies that the voices of psalmody and prophecy are submerged and latent in the drama, emerging from the history in which they are formed even as they form the very grain and texture of the poem. As well, Milton inherits a long tradition, strongly propounded in the writings of Augustine, of reading the Psalms as prophecies fulfilled by the advent of Christ. The tradition is characterized in Milton's century in this statement of John Donne's:

> The Psalmes are the Manna of the Church. As Manna tasted to every man like that he liked best, soe do the Psalmes minister Instruction, and satisfaction, to every man./Wisdom 16.20/ David was not only a cleare Prophet of Christ himselfe, but a prophet of every particular Christian; he fortels what I, what any shall doe, and suffer and say. (Sermon on Psalm 63.7, qtd. in Carrithers 231)

The continuity between psalmic and prophetic poetry is evident in the symbols, images and motifs they share. The comparison of the renewal of youth and strength to the flight of an eagle occurs in Psalm 103:5, recurs in Isaiah 40:31, and is used as a metaphor for Samson's renewal by the semichorus (the eagle is also the symbol of the tribe of Dan). Nativity is also a recurring theme in the major prophets and is applied from the Christian point of view to the coming of Christ. In this particular instance, my treatment of the psalmic allusion in the above-quoted passage is based upon Alter's criteria, namely that prophecy is a public statement made to an historically real audience as opposed to the interior contemplation of psalmic prayer.

Lines 1140 - 1142 may evoke Psalm 139, particularly those middle verses which contemplate the generation of the the body in the womb:

> For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.
> I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.
> My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
> Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there were none of them. (13-16, AV)

Samson's language is not identical with the Authorized Version, but identical diction which verifies the allusion can be found in at least two of the metrical translations of the period.[5] In The whole Psalter translated into English Metre, Matthew Parker, the sixteenth century Archbishop of Canterbury who promoted the production of the "Bishop's Bible" in 1568, translates verse fifteen as: "My substance first: both bones & joynts: were nothing hid fro the."[6] The Countess of Pembroke also employs the words "bone" and "joynt" in a translation which elaborates the central metaphor of the verse:

> Thou, how my back was beam-wise laid,
> And raftring of my ribs, dost know:
> Know'st ev'ry point
> Of bone and joynt,
> How to this whole these partes did grow,
> In brave embrod'ry faire araid,
> Though wrought in shopp both dark and low.[7]

The Sidney translations, which the Countess of Pembroke undertook with Sir Philip Sidney and completed after his death, were circulated privately among their friends and could not have influenced Milton directly. Calvin's commentary on this psalm, however, as translated by Arthur Golding, develops the relationship between "bones" and "strength."[8] The translation of the verse in the commentary reads : "My strength, which thou hast made in secret is not hid from thee, I was woven togither in the lowest parts of the earth."[9] Calvin comments: "And whether he meane our bones, or whether he meane our strengthe: it skilles little to the effect of the matter: howbeit I had leaver understand it of the bones' (232). "Bone" thus takes on the metonymic value of the "strength" instilled in the creature by God. Finally, Thomas Sternhold uses noticeably similar diction in the translation bound with The Bible: "My bones are not hid from thee, though I was made in a secret place, and fashioned beneath in the earth."[10] And the verse translation of Sternhold and Hopkins, bound with the Book of Common Prayer, draws upon the non-metrical phrasing of Sternhold:

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[5] Radzinowicz cites Psalms 7:1, 42:2, 56:11, and 37:40, among others, as pertaining to line 1140, but does not include Psalm 139.
[6] Matthew Parker, *The whole Psalter translated into English Metre* (London: I. Daye, 1567).
[7] The Countess of Pembroke, *The Psalms of Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke*, ed. J.C.A. Rathmell (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 320.
[8] Rathmell argues that Calvin's commentary directly influenced the Countess of Pembroke's translation of Psalm 139 (Introduction, xx).
[9] *The Psalmes of David and others with M. John Calvins Commentaries*, Translated by Arthur Golding (1571), 231.

> My bones they are not hid from thee,
> Although in secret place
> I have been made, and in the earth
> beneath I shaped was.[11]

Variations on phrases containing the words "bones" and "joints," with the possibility of their common ancestry in Golding's translation of Calvin's commentary on the psalm, suggest the currency of the diction and hence a basis for the specific allusion Milton creates.

Samson expresses confidence in the strength which is "diffius'd/ No less through all my sinews, joints and bones,/ Than thine." The comparison in which the psalmic allusion is framed allows it to appeal both to the specific, exclusive *charisma* of Samson's strength as well as to the common humanity of his adversary, and hence to reflect the psalmist's contemplation of the power God demonstrates in the creation of the human form, as well as the relationship of ongoing concern implied in the act of creation, in a way which applies uniquely to one person and generally to all people.

In the context of the exchange between Samson and Harapha, the allusion to Psalm 139 focuses and develops the opposition between divine creative power and human artifice. Samson's formal challenge to Harapha goes into considerable detail:

> Then put on all thy gorgeous arms, thy Helmet
> And Brigandine of brass, thy broad Habergeon,
> Vant-brace and Greaves, and Gauntlet, add thy Spear
> A Weaver's beam, and seven-times-folded shield,
> I only with an Oak'n staff will meet thee,
> And raise such outcries on thy clatter'd Iron,
> Which long shall not withhold me from thy head. (1119-1125)

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[10] Psalm 139:15, The Bible (London: Robert Barker, 1610).

[11] *The Book of Common Prayer Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David* (Cambridge: John Hayes, 1679).

Harapha's "habit carries peace," as the Chorus observes in its function as Samson's corporeal eyes. Samson's challenge therefore amounts to a verbal dressing, as it were, of his opponent in a speech which clearly emphasizes the artificiality of the weapons it describes. The spear like a "Weaver's beam" evokes the contest between David and Goliath in which the formidably-armed Philistine giant is felled by the meanest of weapons. The narrator of 1 Samuel arms Goliath with as much detail as Samson verbally arms Harapha:

> And he had an helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass.
> And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders.
> And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam; and his spear's weighed six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him. (1 Samuel 16:5-7)

In borrowing the metaphor of the weaver's beam from verse 7 to describe Harapha's spear, Milton compels us to look upon weaponry, however terrifying, as merely human artifice. The metaphor is particularly apt since the weaver's loom is a tool of human artifice. In contrast to this, the allusion to Psalm 139 asks us to consider the human form as a work of divine creation. Calvin emphasizes this in his commentary on the psalm passage:

> [David] shewes that God farre excelleth all the excellentest work maisters, who have nede of eyes to bring their work in fashion, where as God shapeth us even in our mothers bowels. . . . GOD withoute the healpe of any lyght, fashyoneth the perfectest of all woorkes, (that is too wit Manne) in his mothers wombe. And the woorde *RAKAM* which signifyeth to weave together, maketh much to the enlarging of the matter. For it is not to be doubted, but that David mente too expresse metaphorically the inestimable workmanshippe whyche appeareth in the shape of mannes body. (231-232)

The opposition of the human form created in the image of God and the artificial weaponry which is a part of the psychology of idolatry Milton attacks here and indeed everywhere in his writings is clarified firstly by Milton's evocation of the contest between David and Goliath in the challenge Samson offers to Harapha and secondly by the allusion to Psalm 139 which contemplation of the power and wonder of divine creation, a psalm which, we may note at this point, was traditionally believed to have been authored by David.

Like the description of Goliath's arms in 1 Samuel, Samson's challenge to Harapha draws attention to the power of verbal description to create a genuinely terrifying image. As an exaggeration of the dimensions of an "ordinary" spear, the metaphor of the weaver's beam depends upon the relative nature of our own perspective for its effect. In Paradise Lost, Milton is able to use epic simile in place of biblical allusion to both create and challenge our perceptions in his description of Satan's spear and shield:

> his ponderous shield
> Ethereal temper, massy, large and round,
> Behind him cast; the broad circumference
> Hung on his shoulders like the Moon, whose Orb
> Through Optic Glass the Tuscan Artist views
> At Ev'ning from the top of *Fesole*,
> Or in Valdarno, to descry new Lands,
> Rivers or Mountains in her spotty Globe.
> His Spear, to equal which the tallest Pine
> Hewn on *Norwegian* hills, to be the Mast
> Of some great Ammiral, were but a wand. (I:284-294)

The dimensions of the weapons are awesome, yet the opposition of divine creation to demonic weaponry is already implied in the simile, for the comparisons are taken from the universe which God created in six days. Satan's shield may be *like* the moon; God *made* the moon which, with the Sun, is "set in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth" (Genesis 1:16). In Book VI of Paradise Lost, the diabolical military inventions of Satan and his legions, which include gunpowder, are defeated on the third day by the Son whose chariot, a symbol of the power which proceeds from God as opposed to an invention or accessory, is described as a "work divinely wrought" (761).

The "seven-times-folded shield" described by Samson in his challenge to Harapha is a classical rather than a biblical allusion. Specifically, it alludes to the "sevenfold shield" of Aeneas' adversary Turnus which is shattered when Turnus is mortally wounded by Aeneas in Book XII of Virgil's Aeneid, or, alternatively, to Aeneas' own shield which is also "sevenfold" (XII: 257). Aeneas' weapons are wrought by Vulcan, the Olympian blacksmith, at the request of Venus, Aeneas' mother. As he forges the weapons in a cavern deep in the earth, Vulcan inscribes the future history of Rome in an *ekphrasis* of visual, prophetic images:

> There the Lord of Fire,
> Knowing the prophets, knowing the age to come,
> Had wrought the future story of Italy,
> The triumphs of the Romans. (VIII:848-851).

Aeneas marvels at the images without fully comprehending them:

> All these images on Vulcan's shield,
> His mother's gift, were wonders to Aeneas.
> Knowing nothing of the events themselves,
> He felt joy in their pictures, taking up
> Upon his shoulder all the destined acts
> And fame of his descendants. (VIII:987-992).

Aeneas' shield is, however, like that of Turnus, also a "seven-fold" shield:

> In streams
> The molten brass and gold flowed. Iron that kills
> Turned liquid in the enormous furnace heat.
> They shaped a vast shield, one that might alone
> Be proof against all missiles of the Latins;
> Fastened it, layer on layer, sevenfold. (VIII:598-603)

The "seven-times-folded" shield described by Samson may perhaps refer to the shield wrought for Aeneas by Vulcan. Vulcan, let us recall, appears in Paradise Lost as Mulciber, one of the names of the demonic artificer Mammon who fashions Pandemonium in part from the precious metals which are mined in Hell:

> Men call'd him *Mulciber*; and how he fell
> From Heav'n, they fabl'd, thrown by angry *Jove*
> Sheer o'er the Crystal Battlements: from Morn
> To Noon he fell, from Noon to dewy Eve,
> A Summer's day; and with the setting Sun
> Dropt from the Zenith like a falling Star,
> On *Lemnos th'Aegean* Isle: thus they relate,
> Erring; for he with this rebellious rout
> Fell long before; nor aught avail'd him now
> To have built in Heav'n high Tow'rs; nor did he scape

> By all his Engines, but was headlong sent
> With his industrious crew to build in hell. (I:740-751)

Since the Fall gives the rebel angels access to the earth, Mammon, who was once cast out of Heaven by God, is encountered again under various names in various "fables." [12] Nevertheless, his original defeat, which prophetically guarantees his eventual second defeat, is implied in the encounter between Harapha and Samson through the evocation of Mulciber, the god of metals, in Milton's description of Harapha's weaponry. Samson's weapon is his body which stands for the human form the recreation of which is concomitant with the destruction of idols. Hence Psalm 139, which Milton alludes to in this pivotal exchange, provides a perspective on the "hidden" God who labours to create the human form as if "in the lowest parts of the earth," and who also foreknows and foretells the creature by inscribing its "members" in his book. Calvin's commentary is again a useful gloss on this passage: "Although my body were fashioned lyttle by lyttle, yet was it always one self same in the booke of GOD, who hath no neede of leysure to finish his woorke" (232). Providential design and temporal process thus interact in the metaphors of weaving and writing in this psalm which conveys a sense of marvel and wonder at God's creative acts.

For Samson, divine prediction is a cause for anxiety rather than wonder given the failures and mistakes that have marked his career. The predictions which identify him as the future deliverer of Israel are made at his nativity, and the allusion to Psalm 139 concerns the development of the embryo, with its "sinews, joints and bones," in the mother's womb. The Psalm presents this development in three distinct but related images. The first is the image of God clothing or "covering" the child in the womb with woven garments. Matthew Parker's translation of verse 13 reads: "In wrapst thou me my mothers wombe:/ with vestures sonderly," while George Wither translates "thou hast covered me" in the AV as "thou closedst mee."[13] The second is the image of God labouring in the depths of the earth (verse 15). The third is the image of God creating the child as if by writing its "members" in a book (verse 16). Sternhold's translation reads:

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[12] The various "names" of the devils in their earthly manifestations, which Milton dwells on at length in Book I, along with the displacement of their activities into narratives of the future, presents another aspect of fallen time conforming to the Augustinian category of "fragmentation."

> Thine eyes did see me when I was without forme:
> for in thy booke were all things written, which
> in continuance were fashioned, when there was
> none of them before.[14]

The words "without forme" in Sternhold's translation present a clear echo of Genesis 1:1-3:

> In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
> And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness
> was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved
> upon the face of the waters.
> And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

The echo links the formation of the child in the womb with the original act of creation whereby God raises form out of chaos and light out of darkness by verbal command. Samson maintains the same association in his broodings on the Nativity, in which his purpose is verbally decreed by a fiery, "twice-descending" angel, as well as on the errors which have exiled him from God's "prime decree" of light:

> O dark, dark, dark amid the blaze of noon,
> Irrecoverably dark, total Eclipse
> Without all hope of day!
> O first created Beam, and thou great Word,
> "Let there be light, and light was over all";
> Why am I thus bereav'd thy prime decree? (80-85)

For Samson, the "prime decree" is both the *fiat lux* of creation and the predictions made at his conception.The contemplation of the power of the Word which orders both the universe and the embryo becomes a quest for orientation in the pattern of providential history.

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[13] George Wither, Psalme CXXXIX, *The Hymns and Songs of the Church* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1967), 275. The work was first printed in London in 1623.

[14] The Bible (London: Robert Barker, 1610).

The allusion to Psalm 139, with its emphasis on divine creative power, is a focal point for this orientation. The image of God weaving the "sinews, joints and bones" of Samson trivializes the merely human contrivance of the spear like a "Weaver's beam," but this conflict of perspective is only one of the functions of the allusion. The image of weaving in the psalm, which is embellished in the verse translations of Matthew Parker, the Countess of Pembroke and in Calvin's commentary on the psalm, is linked to the image of writing by its etymological connection to the word "text," derived from the Latin verb for weaving. The images of writing and weaving in the psalm establish the interplay between Word (as God writing) and flesh (as being covered in the womb) which bears not only on the unique gift of strength conferred on Samson at his nativity but also upon the Incarnation -- the Word made flesh -- as the historic moment which the psalm images in turn predict if read in the framework of the Christian Bible. Whereas the metaphor of the weaver's beam evokes David in his conquest of Goliath, the allusion to Psalm 139, and indeed all of the psalm allusions in the poem, evoke David as the poet revered by tradition as the author of the Psalms. The implied transition in David's career from soldier to poet illustrates the progressive typological transition from Samson, whose destruction of the pagan temple asserts, in a limited and localized manifestation of revolutionary energy, the priority of the divinely created human image over the artificiality of idols, to the revelation of Christ who asserts the ultimate identity of creator and creature.

The theme of Incarnation implied in the interplay of word and flesh in Psalm 139 and emphasized in the commentaries and translations suggests its application to the coming of Christ, the logos, as this event is described in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel. Such a "prophetic" reading of the psalm in the framework of the Christian Bible is supported by typological, Christocentric readings of the Psalms developed by St. Augustine. Such readings make David, as Donne puts it, "a cleare Prophet of Christ himselfe." That Milton adopted this attitude to the Psalms is strongly supported by the large number of psalm citations he uses to support his convictions concerning the nature of the Son of God in the Christian Doctrine. Psalm 2, for example, is used to advance his unorthodox theory of the Son's begetting (YP:207).

David, the dynastic ancestor of Christ, may not have authored all of the Psalms, yet the traditional, popular belief in his authorship functions discernibly in the relationship between psalmic and prophetic poetry and historic events in Samson Agonistes. St. Augustine is among the strongest proponents of David's authorship and in the City of God this contention certainly enhances the prophetic value of the Psalms:

> For my part, I find more credible the judgment of those who attribute all the 150 psalms to David's authorship, and consider that he also supplied the prefatory notes to some of them . . . . (XVII:14)
>
> I am aware that what is now expected of me in this part of my book is an explanation of David's prophecies in the psalms about Jesus Christ and his Church. In fact, although I have done this in respect of one psalm, I am prevented from meeting the demands of this expectation by the abundance of matter rather than by the lack of it. . . . Now to be able to demonstrate this in every psalm, the whole of it has to be explained; and this is no small task, as can be seen from the works of other authors and from my own, in which I have done just this. Anyone who has the wish and the capacity may read those books; he will discover the large number and the great importance of the prophecies uttered by David, who was both king and prophet, about Christ and his Church, that is, about the king and community which he founded. (XVII:15)

The office of prophet is one of the three offices fulfilled by Christ in Augustine's view, the other two being the offices of priest and king. It has been argued that all three offices are fulfilled by the Son in both Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. Moreover, in a discussion of the Holy Spirit in the Christian Doctrine, specifically the concept of prophecy as speaking by the Holy Spirit, Milton defines Christ as the authentic spirit of prophecy , the "Word of God and the Prophet of the Church"(YP:285).

Psalm 139 is one which Augustine reads prophetically in a manner consistent with Milton's theory of prophetic utterance, notwithstanding Milton's departure from Augustine on the concept of the trinity. For Augustine sees the psalm as a case of

Christ speaking in the psalmist and potentially, in our own reading, in us. His preface to his commentary on Psalm 139 states: "Our Lord Jesus Christ speaketh in the Prophets, sometimes in His own Name, sometimes in ours, because He maketh Himself one with us" (Expositions 635). If we turn to his exposition of verse 15, the verse which Milton employs in Samson's exchange with Harapha to present God as a maker and fashioner, we discover Augustine applying the verse to what Milton would call the "better fortitude" of patience:

> What "bone" then meaneth he, brethren? Let us seek it, . . . it is "in secret." But because as Christians we are speaking in the Name of the Lord to Christians, now we find what bone is of this kind. It is a sort of inward strength; for strength and fortitude are found to be in the bones. There is then a sort of inward strength of the soul, wherein it is not broken. Whatever tortures, whatever tribulations, whatever adversities rage around, that which God hath made in secret in us, cannot be broken, yieldeth not. For by God is made a certain strength of patience, of which is said in another Psalm, "But my soul shall be subjected to God, for of him is my patience." . . . Wherein dost thou glory? "In tribulations knowing that God worketh patience." (Expositions 639)

The strength in Samson's "sinews, bones and joints" is therefore, in light of Augustine's commentary, symbolic and prophetic of the higher ethic and inner strength of patience which is the basis of Milton's revaluation of classical ideals of heroic action. There remains, however, the issue of how the prophetic prefiguration resides within and also understands its own limitations. The Harapha episode, in which the allusion with all its rich temporal and typological and symbolic horizons occurs, remains problematic because of the rashness and volatility Samson demonstrates in his willingness to fight a pointless duel. His grasp of the ethic his own words portend is at this juncture still tentative, still not fully fashioned. As such, it contradicts the possibility of an uninterrupted progression in Samson's recovery, and contrasts with the calmness and composure Milton associates with prophetic utterance and action which Samson demonstrates at the pillars.

In the juxtaposition of creation and conflict which is virtually a defining convention of Milton's use of prophecy in Samson Agonistes, the aspect of creation is focused in Samson's nativity which is a special instance of the generation of a human being in all its value and potential. The aspect of conflict or destruction which accompanies this insight leads us to consider the relation of Samson Agonistes to the "Holy War" tradition of the Old Testament by examining, in particular, the presence in the poem of the concept of the "Day of the Lord" as it is drawn from the Hebrew prophets. Before entering into this examination, however, let us briefly reconsider the metaphoric nature of temporal terms in religious experience.

The term "day" is literal in the time frame which circumscribes the action of Samson Agonistes. It is metaphoric in Augustine's equation of a day with an entire epoch which covers several generations. It is symbolic in Saint Paul's exhortation to be "children of the light, and the children of the day" (2 Thessalonians 4:5). The technique of accommodation in Raphael's narrative of the generation of the Son concedes some uncertainty in his use of the term "day." I have argued that Milton's subordinationist theory of the begetting of the Son by the Father values the free, decisive and revelatory actions of God in a temporal continuum over the security of a coequal and coeternal trinity. Raphael's account of the Son's begetting "on such a Day/ As Heav'ns Great Year brings forth" acknowledges the reciprocity of time and narrative as it takes care to relate events which are experienced differently "in eternity," even as it encourages us to consider the similitude of heaven and earth. Raphael's narrative clearly prophesies the Incarnation of Christ at the centre of human history, yet his narrative is designed to ward off the actualization of that same history by strengthening Adam and Eve against temptation. The apparently perverse fatalism which this situation implies is, as Augustine argues, a mistaken impression fostered by the fragmented and disassociated nature of time and events as projections of fallen consciousness, for time is itself the element of humankind's separation from God, and is itself an object of redemption. A fatalistic deity would not send Raphael to earth, and his visit, with its emphasis on friendship, the fellowship of the table, and its symbolic place at the centre of the poem, is in itself, apart from the contents of the narrative, a prefiguration of the Incarnation. As such, it is a demonstration of the plenitude of a moment which human perversity vacates.

Samson Agonistes takes place within a single day in accordance with the neo-Aristotelian precept of the unity of time.[15] This time frame allows the central conflict between God and Dagon to be established as a conflict of occasions or "days." In Paradise Lost, the "day" of the Son's begetting is the occasion of a sabbath celebration. Likewise, according to Augustine's scheme, the six ages or "days" of history end in a perpetual sabbath which marks the end of conflict and tribulation. In fallen time, where change is registered as reversal, decline and decay, the festival decreed by the Philistines presents a false analogy of genuine sabbath. Like Samson himself, the Philistines interpret the downfall of Samson as marking the end of an era and the end of his involvement in history. What is more, they interpret his downfall as a saving action taken by the idol Dagon, which presents a false or at best illusory analogy of the pattern of intervenient saving events which constitute Hebrew historic awareness. The antagonism between Samson and the Philistines is focused more and more, within the carefully limited time frame of the drama, by the opposition between the pagan pseudo-sabbath and the emerging "Day of the Lord."

> This day a solemn Feast the people hold
> To *Dagon* thir Sea-idol, and forbid
> Laborious works, unwillingly this rest
> Thir superstition yields me. (12-15)

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[15] Aristotle does not insist on the unity of time in the Poetics. The Italian commentators of the sixteenth century raised the principle to the level of prescription.

> This day the Philistines a popular Feast
> Here celebrate in Gaza; and proclaim
> Great Pomp, and Sacrifice, and Praises Loud
> To Dagon, as their God who hath deliver'd
> Thee, Samson, bound and blind into thir hands. (433-437)
>
> This idol's-day hath been to thee no day of rest
> Laboring thy mind
> More than the workings of thy hands. (1297-1299)
>
> Samson, to thee our Lords thus bid me say;
> This day to *Dagon* is a solemn Feast,
> With Sacrifices, Triumph, Pomp and Games. (1310-1312)

As a public proclamation which impresses a meaning or interpretation upon time and events in time, the "Idol's day" works as a form of prophecy as well as sabbath. The counteracting prophecy is made by Samson when he reverses his position and agrees to attend the festival:

> If there be aught of presage in the mind,
> This day will be remarkable in my life
> By some great act, or of my days the last. (1387-1389)

The cautious, qualified and conditional nature of this "prophecy" serves to contrast with the recklessness of his earlier career, and indeed of earlier episodes, and in this sense may betoken a hard-learned patience.[16] Of interest here, however, is the use of the expression "This day" which, as a verbal echo which resonates through the text,. clearly opposes the idolatrous sabbath (and prophecy) by creating and imposing a conflicting impression on time. In his complaint for his blindness in the prologue, Samson speaks of darkness "without all hope of day." His prediction at the moment of dramatic reversal offers the hope, not of daylight, but of a singular, momentous, and memorable day.

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[16] According to Daniel Lochman, the tightly circumscribed logic of the passage qualifies its nature as prophecy which should be, Lochman argues, "a movement beyond the limits, the normal strictures of the everyday world . . . an excursion into an illogical, unlimited, and often indistinctly perceived future" (195), a description which, I would add, also applies to the Pauline doctrine of provisional faith (Hebrews XI) which is basic to the drama of the moment. Lochman further argues that the logic of the passage turns the dualistic, either-or reasoning of the audience back on itself as "Milton's audience, like Samson, must learn to see existence as mixed and ambiguous, irreducible to simple, absolute alternative" (196). "If there be aught of presage": Milton's Samson as Riddler and Prophet, Milton Studies, 22 (1986), 195-216.

The expression "this day" is another of those brief, allusive devices which draw upon a significant psalmic and in this case prophetic motif which thereby becomes part of the texture of the entire drama. In the Christian Doctrine, as we have seen, Milton uses Psalm 2 as evidence of the Son's generation "within the limits of time . . . as is sufficiently clear from the insertion of the word *to-day* " (YP): "Thou art my beloved Son, This Day have I begotten thee." Such a reading of the psalm (authorized by Paul in Hebrews 5:5) endows the term "day" with a typological significance. At the same time, it enhances the psalmist's sense of history as bearing the imprint of divine actions: "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (118:24). Creation and deliverance are defining features of the sense of history which links the Psalms to the major and minor prophets. Many prophetic texts respond to the situation of Israel's captivity in Babylon, a situation which parallels the enslavement of Israel in Egypt generations earlier as well as the Philistine occupation which defines Samson's moment in history. Von Rad emphasizes the perception of historic parallels in his study of Isaiah:

> There can be no doubt that the prophet regards the exodus of the redeemed from Babylon as the counterpart in the saving history to Israel's departure from Egypt in the far off past. He in fact stresses the parallel courses of the two events -- Jahweh is once more to go forth as a warrior (Is. XLII. 13), as he then did against the Egyptians, and at the new exodus, as at first, he is miraculously to make water flow from the rock for his people to drink (Is. XLVIII. 21). (Old Testament Theology 2: 246)

Manoa reads parallel episodes into Samson's life, as, for example, when he argues that the God who caus'd a fountain at thy prayer/ From the dry ground to spring, thy thirst to allay" can also "Cause light again within thy eyes to spring" (581, 584). The prophet's reading of parallels in history implies that the eternal moment of providence is distributed into time in the aspects of creation and deliverance.

Deliverance in the Old Testament is often a product of conflict and war. The concept of the "Day of the Lord" as it is expressed in Old Testament prophecy presents images of destruction and conflagration which influence apocalyptic, eschatological and millenarian thought into Milton's era and beyond. As a confluence of many prophetic themes and images, Revelation certainly influenced Milton's treatment of tragic form. The Old Testament concept of the "Day of the Lord" in Samson Agonistes merits particular attention, however, for this concept elaborates the destructive and discordant elements which, in conjunction with the creative and synthetic elements which center on the idea of nativity, define Milton's use of prophecy.

Von Rad has studied this prophetic concept with respect to its origins rather than its subsequent influences. While Amos 5:18 is generally viewed as the *locus classicus* for the concept, Von Rad argues that Isaiah 13, 34, Ezekiel 7 and Joel 2 "provide a more secure foundation" because they provide "the closed context of literary units" rather than "short and aphoristic instances" of the concept ("The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh" 98-99). Isaiah 13, described by Von Rad as the "Babylon poem," reads as follows:

> Howl ye; for the day of the LORD *is* at hand;
> it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.
> Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every
> man's heart shall melt:
> And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows
> shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain
> as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed
> one at another; their faces shall be as flames.
> Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel
> both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the
> land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners
> thereof out of it.
> For the stars of heaven and the constellations
> thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall
> be darkened in his going forth, and the moon
> shall not cause her light to shine. (6-10).

The image patterns in this passage, as well as certain aspects of its diction, are all deployed in Samson Agonistes. Verse 10, for example, which describes the darkening of the sun and the moon,[17] is recreated in Samson's prologue:

> The Sun to me is dark
> And silent as the Moon,
> When she deserts the night,
> Hid in her vacant interlunar cave. (86-89)

The image of the woman in travail, which recurs throughout Isaiah, Jeremiah, and is also prominent in the New Testament, becomes a poignant reassertion of the Nativity covenant, and the terms of its fulfilment, in Samson's last hours. Virginia Mollenkot compares the image in Isaiah to "God's anguish at the human failure to embody justice" and adds that this "image makes God seem very much present alongside all those who are oppressed by the suffering and turmoil of our world" (The Divine Feminine 15). Secondly, the phrase "they shall be amazed one at another" in verse 7 is clearly echoed in Samson's final speech to the Philistine audience when he declares that his final action "As with amaze shall strike all who behold" (1645). Finally, the context of many of the "Day of the Lord" prophecies in the Old Testament is that of a sacrificial festival: "I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation" (Amos 8:10). The destruction of a festival and the reversal of modes from praise to lamentation (for the Philistines) and from lamentation to praise (for the Hebrews, as Manoa predicts, at least, that Samson will be honoured in song) are portrayed in Samson Agonistes. Milton clearly draws upon this prophetic concept for the outcome of the "contest" between God and Dagon.

Von Rad concludes that the prophetic concept of the "Day of the Lord" "encompasses a pure event of war, the rise of Yahweh against his enemies, his battle and his victory" (103). As such, the concept derives from the "holy war" tradition of ancient Israel. The Judges narrative which is the source of Milton's drama chronicles a series of military leaders who are the successors of Joshua, the conqueror of Canaan. Samson is, of course, an anomaly in this chronicle because he never raises or leads an army but instead possesses a strength which, in the words of Milton's Chorus, makes "arms ridiculous." Milton's alignment of his biblical tragedy with the Holy War tradition is further problematized by the physical nature of Samson's deeds, for the concept of physical warfare is subsumed in the western literary tradition into a central metaphor of inner spiritual experience, as we see in the Psychomachia of Prudentius, the allegories of Spenser's Faerie Queene and Bunyan's The Holy War. Commenting on the destructive or "anti-cosmic" gesture in the rendition of the Day of the Lord in Amos 5:18, Herbert Marks describes the sublimation of warfare in literature:

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[17] See also Amos 8:9.

> Anticosmic gestures are a basic strategy of much Western literature, but the force of Amos's negations is foreign to literature, where aggression is typically converted into *contemptus mundi*, iconoclastic quest, or the rage for aesthetic order, while its object is subsumed into some ulterior reality -- often a book, a similitude or "mesocosm" which preserves the world it would resolve. . . . In the later prophetic writings we are given something similar. A book, or its visionary prototype, subsumes the perceptual reality negated by the prophetic word. By contrast, the oral rhetoric of early prophecy refuses to convert its passion, whether for an artifice of eternity or for a seat in the apocalyptic theatre. The negations of Amos make their own amends. ("The Twelve Prophets" 224)

After hearing the Messenger's report of Samson's death, Manoa immediately plans Samson's verbal memorial: his acts will be enrolled "In copious legend, or sweet lyric Song" ; Virgins shall visit his tomb "on feastful days." Yet Manoa's expectations are merely at a tangent to Milton's interpretation of the Samson legend, for if the legend is subsumed and comprehended, it is in the battle waged in Paradise Regained, the companion piece to Samson Agonistes. Before considering the broader implications of the typology of Samson Agonistes, we may note that many of the prophetic themes and images Milton draws upon sustain the typological relationship between Samson and Christ. The motifs of darkness at noon, earthquakes and tempests recur in the accounts of the crucifixion in the gospels which tell of a solar eclipse and the tearing of the "veil of the temple" by an earthquake. Furthermore, the setting of the action of Samson Agonistes at noon aligns it with the hour of Eve's temptation in Paradise Lost and the traditional hour of the crucifixion in the gospels. Christ's sense of abandonment, demonstrated in his recitation of the beginning of Psalm 22, is evoked in Samson's sense of "exile" from light in the prologue. The motifs and images of the Day of the Lord imply the antithesis of exile and abandonment, however. Darkness and even chaos betoken presence rather than absence in the context of this prophetic pattern. We therefore have another instance of "branching symbolism" which requires that symbols be read in a "dichotomy of eternal and temporal possibilities" and which makes the dichotomous reading an extension of the fundamental dialectic which informs the poem.

These observations argue for a positive typological relationship between Samson and Christ based, not upon the condition of absolute similitude which at times makes typology a contentious and divisive feature of Samson criticism, but rather upon the dialectic and dichotomous interplay of artistic as well as theological relationships which reflect the conditions which time both consists of and imposes. After reviewing the issue of typology in Samson criticism, I will attempt to contribute to the debate by suggesting how biblical allusion, as a means of orienting the drama in the temporal patterns of the Bible, might condition our view of typology in this poem.

If, as Frye has said, typology both assumes and leads to a theory of history (The Great Code 80-81), and if, as Edward Tayler has said, the "theory of types represents in codified form what is in effect a doctrine of time and an interpretation of history" (Milton's Poetry: Its Development in Time 28),.then a central part of both the theory and the interpretation must concern the relationship between history and prophecy. The shift in Paradise Lost from the pre-historical, "timeless" realm of Eden, where Raphael converses with Adam, to Eden after the Fall, where Michael presents his vision of fallen history, involves a corresponding shift from accommodation to typology. Yet this shift is really a shift in emphasis: the two methods are more complementary than exclusive, for both narratives focus on the relationship between Adam and Eve and Christ. Before the Fall, accommodation emphasizes a relationship of "vertical" correspondence in a cosmos that is still synchronized with God's will. After the Fall, Adam and Michael look forward "horizontally" along the plane of fallen history, and witness the distribution of God's will in a succession of elect individuals which culminates in the Incarnation. The graded steps of a hierarchically ordered cosmos give way to the progressive increments of an ordered revelation. The various "just" persons God raises appear at different moments in history, yet their separate advents are all complementary analogies to the creation of Adam, for just as Noah and Enoch and others appear in times of crisis and discord, so too is Adam created in response to the rebellion and expulsion of Satan and his legions.

Typology links history to prophecy by virtue of its insistence on the concrete reality of the events it interprets. In commenting on Tertullian's exposition of the significance of Jesus' name, Erich Auerbach suggests that historicity is the crux of typological prefiguration or "phenomenal prophecy" in patristic Christianity:

> . . the naming of Joshua-Jesus is treated as a prophetic event foreshadowing things to come. Just as Joshua and not Moses led the people of Israel into the promised land of Palestine, so the grace of Jesus, and not the Jewish law, leads the "second people" into the promised land of eternal beatitude. The man who appeared as the prophetic annunciation of this still hidden mystery . . . was introduced under the *figura* of the divine name. Thus the naming of Joshua-Jesus is a phenomenal prophecy or prefiguration of the future Saviour; *figura* is something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical. The relationship between the two events is revealed by an accord or similarity. ("Figura" 29)

Milton cites the same figural prophecy in Book XII of Paradise Lost and supports it with the same interpretation:

> So Law appears imperfet, and but giv'n
> With purpose to resign them in full time
> Up to a better Cov'nant, disciplin'd
> From shadowy Types to Truth, from Flesh to Spirit,
> From imposition of strict Laws, to free

> Acceptance of large Grace, from servile fear
> To filial, works of Law to works of Faith.
> And therefore shall not *Moses*, though of God
> Highly belov'd, being but 'the Minister
> Of Law, his people into *Canaan* lead;
> But *Joshua* whom the Gentiles *Jesus* call,]
> His Name and Office bearing, who shall quell
> The adversary Serpent, and bring back
> Through the world's wilderness long wander'd man
> Safe to eternal Paradise of rest. (XII:300-314)

The progression from, and distinction between, flesh and spirit is therefore one of the central premises in Milton's typology. As Ryken observes, "the difference between a type and antitype is not a matter of time only but can also be a difference between the physical and the spiritual, between the external medium and the internal meaning" (29). Ryken here criticizes William Madsen's contention that the type, in contrast to the figures presented through accommodation, "looks forward in time, not upward through the scale of being" ("From Shadowy Types to Truth" 99). Ryken's view of the complementary and mutually supportive relation between accommodation and typology is borne out in Paradise Lost. Moreover, accommodation gestures towards this complementarity by conceding its own descent into the temporal distribution, not of fallen history which, when Raphael visits Adam, is not yet a condition of life, but of narrative which consists of words in temporal succession. For Raphael, the descent, though necessary, is a descent into the unfamiliar and the restrictive. For Michael, working in the framework of an actualized fallen history, the unfamiliar and the restrictive have unfortunately become the norm.

Typology exists as an interpretive method before Christianity: the nature of the similitude between events in the Old Testament is a feature of rabbinical traditions. St. Paul, who was probably trained in these Hebrew traditions, not surprisingly advances the method of typology into Christianity. The development of typological exegesis by the Church Fathers represents an extension of Paul's approach. For Augustine in particular, the Incarnation which is simultaneously historical and eternal, in time and out of time, leads him to reconstitute typologically significant events under the aspect of eternity while preserving their historicity. As Auerbach observes:

> Even though Augustine rejects abstract allegorical spiritualism and develops his whole interpretation of the Old Testament from the concrete historical reality, he nevertheless has an idealism which removes the concrete event, completely preserved as it is, from time and transposes it into a perspective of eternity. Such ideas were implicit in the notion of the Incarnation of the Word; the figural interpretation of history paved the way for them, and they made their appearance at an early day. ("Figura" 42)

The Son's voluntary offer to redeem mankind, made in the scene of heavenly council in Book III of Paradise Lost, raises the Incarnation and its atoning sacrifice into the perspective of eternity without compromising its historicity. The eternal vantage point thereby frames and limits the random vagaries of fallen temporal experience. Samson Agonistes lacks the framing device of the heavenly council scene, yet the drama is occupied with the eternal reality, as opposed to temporal potential, of Samson's status as deliverer. The descending and reascending angel of Samson's nativity implies the "vertical" interaction of the eternal and the temporal. Yet the drama must work out and declare this interaction on the plane of typology.

The progression in time from "shadowy Types to Truth" implies that the significance of an event which is already constituted in eternity is deferred in time until the arrival of the event which adumbrates and fulfills it. Both Augustine and Milton view this progression in terms of flesh and spirit, law and gospel. In The Spirit and the Letter Augustine interprets St. Paul's discussion of the purpose of the rite of circumcision:

> The apostle's reproof and correction of those uponwhom circumcision was being urged may seem to indicate that what he calls the law is circumcision and similar legal observances, which as shadows of what was to come are now rejected by Christians, who hold the reality of that which was promised in a figure through those shadows. But the law, by which he says that no man is justified, is meant by him to be taken in the sense not only of those ordinances which were given to them as figures of the promise, but also of the works in whose performance is the life of righteousness. (Later Works 212-213)

Milton's concern with the relation between letter and spirit is reflected in Samson's status as a "Nazirite from birth" which, while a strongly suggestive point of identity between Samson and Christ, is equally concerned with cultic prescriptions and observances which call for a rigorous asceticism. Without either dwelling on or rationalizing Samson's spectacular failures in this regard, one might argue that the failures, if nothing else, prove that salvation is not from the law. The more significant deviation occurs when Samson reverses a decision which reflects a sense of identity based upon the law and agrees to attend the Philistine festival. The reversal is not a deviation but a transition from letter to spirit, not an abrogation which rejects the law but an abrogation which fulfills the law as a term of covenantal relationship rather than binding restriction.

The directional and purposeful nature of typology in both Augustine and Milton implies that providential time includes a notion of progress. In her survey of the paradigms of history which govern seventeenth century literature, Achsah Guibbory perceives an ideal of progress in Milton's writings which deliberately contrasts with the cycle as a metaphor for the repetition caused by entrapment in religious and political errors. Milton's unorthodox theory of the Son's begetting by the Father in both reflects, in Guibbory's view, a positive attitude to change and a creative God who is perpetually making all things new (181). The call for the reforming of the Reformation in *Areopagitica*, which contains the image of a nation of prophets in the figure of the revived Samson, also signals the need to break with the errors of the past.The image of Samson in *Areopagitica* cannot simply be transferred to *Samson Agonistes*, however, for failure of the religious and political renovation Milton calls for in his tracts is sufficient to call into question the notion of progress in Milton's thought and to consider on what terms, if any, it survives in the major poems in general and in *Samson Agonistes* in particular.

The development of Augustine's thought on this subject offers striking parallels to Milton's. Like Milton, Augustine viewed theories of time as endless cyclic repetition as *anathema* to Christian revelation. He had also to contend with the notion of progress as the advent of an earthly, political kingdom centered in Rome which was to experience continual material improvement by virtue of its fidelity to the true God, a notion which parallels millenarian expectations of a reign of saints in Milton's era. Theodor Mommsen summarizes the trend this way:

> . . . some of the most prominent Christian apologists voiced views which implied the belief that under the auspices of Christianity the world had made concrete progress in historical time and that further progress could be expected.Those writers asserted that the new creed was bringing blessings to the whole of mankind, not merely to its own adherents. They pointed to the historically undeniable fact that the birth of Christ had taken place at the time of of the foundation of the Roman empire by Augustus and the establishment of the *Pax Romana* on earth. As the appearance of Christ coincided with a marked improvement of all things secular, so, the earthly apologists argued, the growth of the new faith will be accompanied by further progress. (278)

In his Ecclesiastical History, Eusebius observes that "since the reign of Augustus no misfortune has befallen [the empire] ; on the contrary, all things have been splendid and glorious, in accordance with the wishes of all" (Mommsen 278).

This view of history was destroyed in 410 A.D. when Rome fell to an invading force. The City of God, over which Augustine laboured for more than a decade after the invasion, responds to the crisis by working out a theory of Christian history. Against the notion of earthly progress which had taken hold in Christian thinking before the invasion, Augustine proposes a conception of "historical process in the form of two tracks the course of which have been laid out by God and are to be followed by the successive generations of the two communities. . . . With regard to the course of the heavenly city it may be said that there is a 'progress,' not of any materialistic nature, but in the sense that there is a gradual revelation of the divine truth communicated by God to man, especially through the prophecies predicting the future

Messiah" (Mommsen 295). Here Augustine describes how the eternal is revealed progressively in a temporal medium:

> The experience of mankind in general, as far as God's people is concerned, is comparable to the experience of the individual man. There is a process of education, through the epochs of a people's history, as through the successive stages of a man's life. designed to raise them from the temporal and the visible to the eternal and the invisible. (X:14)
>
> God, in his own nature, so to say, neither begins nor ceases to speak; he speaks not temporally, but eternally, not corporally but spiritually; not to the sense but to the understanding. Yet through his created beings he spoke in successive syllables, following one another in transitory intervals of time. (X:15)

Samson Agonistes is concerned with the eventual illumination of the "inward" eye of understanding as well as with the maturation of religious experience, a process which anticipates the fulfilment of Samson as a type but which also engages him in the problem of his own self-fulfilment.[18] Samson's adequacy as a type of Christ, and with it, the value of his role in the ethical scheme Milton's poetry advances, is, however, among the most contentious issues in Milton criticism. Let us examine the state of this debate at the present time and consider how the study of temporal patterns in the poem, particularly as they are based on biblical allusion, contribute to our understanding of Milton's typology.

Joseph Wittreich's Interpreting Samson Agonistes is of value both as the starting point and as the culmination of the debate for it is the most recent major interpretive statement on the poem. As well, in its awareness of the re-evaluation of traditional Samson typology it presents, and with this a good deal of the Milton criticism that follows from it, Interpreting Samson Agonistes begins with a summary of the various critical positions which surround the poem in the twentieth century with the attitudes to typology they assume. In Wittreich's opinion, criticism of Samson Agonistes is problematized by the relationship between typology which, as a received tradition preconditions interpretations of the poem, and narrative techniques which indicate the poet's interpretation, as it is reflected in the poem he creates, of his material both as narrative (Samson in Judges) and typology (the hermeneutical precepts of Milton's era). This problematic relationship finds its own reflection, Wittreich argues, in twentieth century interpretations of the poem which are preconditioned and overshadowed by readings which are privileged by institutionalized criticism.

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[18] Barabara Lewalski, who emphasizes Samson as a type of the Christian Elect more than as a type of Christ, has demonstrated Augustine's influence on Milton's view of eschatology. "Samson Agonistes and the 'Tragedy' of the Apocalypse," PMLA, 85 (1970), 1050-1062.

Wittreich identifies F. Michael Krouse's Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition as a major source which misaligns the relationship between Medieval and Renaissance typology and thereby misappropriates it for modern Milton criticism. Krouse posits a clear continuity between the Medieval and the Renaissance views of Samson and so establishes a positive model of the relationship between Samson and Christ. Krouse asks if the striking difference between Milton's Samson and the Samson of Judges is a product of the poet's imagination or of an historical and interpretive tradition (14). Krouse discovers that the Samson who "lies behind, and between, the lines of Milton's tragedy" emerges from the "biblical commentaries, the sermons, the *exempla*, and other writings of the Fathers of the early Church, the Schoolmen of the late Middle Ages, and the learned divines of the Renaissance" (17). Wittreich redirects our attention to "sermons (often prophesyings in the sense that they articulate freshly emerging interpretations of biblical texts) and to political tracts (often dependent upon, and developments of, the new discoveries of such prophesyings)" which "enlarge the historical perspective by engaging the contrary evidence" (Interpreting Samson Agonistes 11). From Wittreich's evidence there emerges a very negative, "contrastive" Samson typology. The Samson who emerges in Wittreich's "later Samson hermeneutic" is in many ways similar to rather than different from the Samson of Judges, especially if Milton's poem and the Bible account are read and compared in their narrative techniques. Wittreich's Samson is similar to the Samson Von Rad describes in his commentary on Judges, a Samson who both destroys and is destroyed by the unresolved conflict between *eros* and *charisma* in his personality.[19] Moreover, a revised typology has important consequences for the attitudes to prophecy and history in the poem. Unlike Guibbory, Wittreich sees the Samson story not as a break with the past but rather as an example of the past we must break from. Hence in "Samson Agonistes we see myth mutilated into tragedy, in Paradise Regained we envision mythology modulated into history, and prophecy, masking itself as history, moving toward fulfilment" (Interpreting Samson Agonistes 115).

Both Wittreich and Von Rad pay careful attention to the narrative art of Judges. Neither acknowledges, however, the anticipation of psalm structures which exist in the Judges narrator's portrayal of reassertions of divine covenant which reverse history. Repetitive and pessimistic cycles are certainly present, yet they need not efface the concept of divine action which Judges portrays. It is precisely this pattern of emergence, especially as it anticipates in its structure the Psalms, the Prophets, and the parables of Christ (specifically the Prodigal Son), which conveys Milton's progressive typology. My theoretical premise, therefore, is that biblical allusion becomes a technique which orients a text in an historic framework if and when the poet, the characters, and, by implication, the audience are conscious of their position in a period of disorientation, uncertainty and drift. Samson and Christ reside on opposite sides of the appearance in history of the psalmic and prophetic texts (many of which were written to reorient a people in exile) which divide Judges from the New Testament, yet Milton draws richly on these texts for both Samson Agonistes and Paradise Regained. The Son commands a knowledge and understanding of all of these texts; Samson reaches for them in both word and deed, and his reach exceeds his grasp.The disparities between Samson and the Son are another version of the polarities in fallen human nature which constitute time according to their relative strengths and weaknesses, and Milton always has his poetic eye on our human nature.

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[19] Old Testament Theology, Vol. I, 334. Wittreich draws upon Von Rad's commentary on p. 123 of Interpreting Samson Agonistes.

Finally, as a practical demonstration of these premises, I will take issue with one of Wittreich's significant observations about the allusiveness of Samson Agonistes in order to show how the poem bears witness to, rather than eradicates or dissolves, the essential tensions and ambiguities in religious experience. In his final speech (as reported by the Messenger) to the Philistine audience gathered to watch his spectacular humiliation, a speech already quoted before, Samson disassociates himself from the feats he has just performed and thereby from the will of those who direct his performance:

> "Hitherto, Lords, what your commands impos'd
> I have perform'd, as reason was, obeying,
> Not without wonder or delight beheld.
> Now of my own accord such other trial
> I mean to show you of my strength, yet greater;
> As with amaze shall strike all who behold."

The phrase "of my own accord" is featured in Joseph Wittreich's demonstration of the "contrastive" typology which he presents as the basis of the relationship between Samson and Christ in Interpreting Samson Agonistes (110-113). Basing his interpretation on the paired liturgical readings of the Book of Common Prayer in Milton's era, Wittreich identifies the phrase "of my own accord" as an allusion to Caiaphas' "prophecy" in John 11: 49-53:

> But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year said to them, "You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from day on they took council how to put him to death. (RSV)

Wittreich argues that "*Of his own accord* is always used scripturally to mean by one's own initiative (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:17 and Acts 12:10), and here it is used to imply a contrast between the false prophets who act of their own accord and the true prophets who act by divine commission. In precisely this way, the Messenger employs the same phrase in Samson Agonistes " (112). The allusion to John 11:49-53 contained in the Messenger's report is viewed by Wittreich as exposing Samson as a false prophet whose destructiveness is distinguished from the divine humanity of Christ, the fulfilment of true prophecy. 2 Peter 1:21 glosses the problem in the life of the early church: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were moved* by the Holy Ghost" (AV).

Wittreich contrasts John 10 with John 11 in his summary of the ordinances of the Book of Common Prayer, but he overlooks the phrase in John 11:17-18 which is surely designed to contrast with John 11:51:

> "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received of my Father" (RVS).

The identity of phrasing in these two passages suggests that the artistry of the Gospel narrative, as a context in which the allusion must be considered, can and should modify our critical judgment.

The exact phrases "of my own accord" (John 10:18) and "of his own accord" (John 11:51) are found in the Revised Standard Version, a twentieth century translation which cannot be the source of the diction in line 1643 of Samson Agonistes.. If, on the other hand, we survey and compare translations of John 10:18 with John 11:51, we find that the phrasing is consistently identical:

> No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself (10:18, AV).
>
> And this he spake not of himself, but being high priest
> that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation (11:51, AV).

> No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of my self (10:18, The Geneva Bible).[20]
>
> And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation (11:51, The Geneva Bible).
>
> No man taketh it from me: but I put it awaye of my selfe. (10:18, Tyndale, 1534).[21]
>
> This spake he not of him selfe, but beinge hye preste that same yere, he prophesied that Iesus shulde dye for the people (11:51, Tyndale, 1534).

The Gospel writer's purpose in matching these two phrases bears upon the interpretation of the allusion in Samson Agonistes.. The proximity of the phrases in John's Gospel, in addition to their identity, conveys the disparity between Christ the "good shepherd" and Caiaphas the "blind guide." Indeed, Christ's account of his sense of mission in John 10 begins, significantly, with the healing of a blind man, an event which provokes an immediate confrontation with the Pharisees (John 9). John's has been called an "epiphanic" gospel because of its first chapter, with its narrative of the Incarnation as an advent of light which the darkness cannot comprehend. In John 10, Christ summons his hearers to the recognition of his identity, and the part of this epiphany expressed in John 10:18 concerns the self-possession and independence which are possible, paradoxically, in the posture of reliance on God which Milton defines as patience. Samson demonstrates this self-possession in his final speech, which does not mean that his destructive action apocalyptically renovates the social and political order, but only that it asserts, in a localized and time-bound expression of revolutionary energy, the value of the person as a created image of God in opposition to the repressive and degrading forces which are adequately consolidated as "idolatry." Caiaphas' prophecy, as the cynical expression of political expediency which, in its blindness, sees no choices, is the antithesis of the free expression of John 10:18 which Samson's speech, notwithstanding its limitations, portends.[22]

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[20] Bound in The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church According to the Use of the Church of England Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David Pointed as they are to be Sung or Said in Churches. (Cambridge: J. Hayes, 1679).

[21] The New Testament Translated by William Tyndale, A Reprint of the Edition of 1534 with the Translator's Prefaces and Notes and the variants of the edition of 1525, ed. N. Hardy Wallis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938).

If Samson acts of his "own accord" independently of the will of God then the result is, as Wittreich argues, the tragedy of a false prophet rather than the persistent and paradoxical generic problem of "Christian" tragedy. Notice, however, that the last sentence of John 10:18 -- "This commandment have I received of my Father" (AV) -- also invites comparison with Samson's veiled statement of purpose in line 1404: "Master's commands come with a power resistless." John 10:18 is arguably the source of both "of my own accord" (1463) and "Master's commands come with a power resistless" (1404), two ideas which, when brought together (as they are in John 10:18), construct the paradox of free will and divine guidance which is central to Milton's ethical concerns. This paradox must be considered in any typological interpretation of Samson Agonistes, for it is the paradox, and not any one side of it, which sustains the ethical dialogue between the poem and its biblical sources.

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[22] Note also John 18:34. Pilate asks Christ, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" Christ answers, "Sayest thou this thing *of thyself*, or did others tell it thee of me?" (emphasis mine). The expression "of thyself" appears to distinguish freedom from coercion in this part of John's gospel.

V: THE CIRCUMSCRIPTION OF TIME

Until now we have examined Samson Agonistes in terms of the dialectic of conceptual and experiential views of time it explores. The poem draws on biblical texts both to sustain and extend this dialectic by recreating the psalmist's quest for orientation in the pattern of providential history on the one hand and the prophet's perspective of this pattern on the other. The completion of this study now requires us to assess the manifestation of the biblical forms of expression in the poem in and through the conventions of classical tragedy, the form Milton both chooses and changes in order to interpret the story of Samson and locate it in his vision of time.

My premise is essentially the same as that of Martin Mueller, who offers this generalization in his comparison of Milton and Goethe:

> The expression of the theme of redemption through the use of classical plot conventions involves important modifications of those conventions. In any period, conventions of literary form will reflect the structure of temporal experience. Thus it is almost paradoxical that the theme of redemption should be expressed in terms of plot conventions developed in response to a mode of temporal experience which the Redemption revolutionized. ("Time and Redemption" 228)

Milton closes the preface to Samson Agonistes by endorsing the principle of the unity of time derived from Aristotle's Poetics: "The circumscription of time, wherein the whole Drama begins and ends, is according to ancient rule, and best example, within the space of 24 hours." Yet within this rigorous circumscription we discover the biblical account of creation, reflections upon biblical history and the roles of law and prophecy in that history, and anticipations of the Incarnation and the Apocalypse which, with the Creation, comprise the cardinal moments in the outline of providential history. In spite of the broad perspective Milton sustains within a compressed form, tragedy essentially remains, as Milton reminds us in Latin in the epigraph to the preface to Samson Agonistes, an "imitation of an action that is serious and complete and has sufficient size . . . exciting pity and fear, bringing about the catharsis of such emotions" (Poetics 49b20, 76). If the nature of the action Milton imitates is providential, then Milton must, as Mueller suggests, revalue the conventions of tragedy in order to imitate the action faithfully and effectively. How Milton achieves this faithful imitation is the subject of this chapter.

In broadest terms, this subject involves the relationship between form and content. The contentiousness of the criticism which surrounds the poem testifies to the difficulty of this relationship. I propose to survey the seminal and influential critical statements in order to provide a context for my own conclusions.

Samuel Johnson's famous complaint about the absence of a middle in the poem is our point of departure. In a summary of the action of the poem, Johnson finds nothing which either hastens or delays the catastrophe and therefore declares it to be inferior to classical models:

> . . . the poem, therefore, has a beginning and an end which Aristotle himself could not have disapproved; but it must be allowed to want a middle, since nothing passes between the first act and the last, that either hastens or delays the death of Samson. (163)

Samson Agonistes obviously possesses episodes which occupy the middle of the poem; these consist of Samson's encounters with Manoa, Dalila and Harapha. Dr. Johnson's complaint concerns the relationship of these episodes to each other as well as to the outcome of the poem, for without a causal impulse which conforms to the precepts of probability and necessity the poem falls short of Aristotelian standards. Although he censures what he correctly observes, Johnson's criticism identifies and focuses a primary principle of Milton's revaluation of the genre. In his perceptive commentary on the Poetics, Paul Ricoeur makes observations which support (though this is not Ricoeur's purpose) the standards Johnson applies to Samson Agonistes:

> It is not episodes as such that Aristotle disapproves of; tragedy can forgo them only under the penalty of becoming monotonous, and epic makes the best use of them. What he condemns is disconnected episodes. . . . One after the other is merely episodic and therefore improbable, one because of the other is a causal sequence and therefore probable. No doubt is allowed. The kind of universality that a plot calls for derives from its ordering, which brings about its completeness and wholeness. (Time and Narrative 1: 41)

If we simply allow for the possibility that the middle episodes of Samson Agonistes are disconnected, improbable, and reflective of a certain randomness in human experience, then the problem no longer has to do with proving that this particular poem conforms to Aristotelian norms but has to do instead with understanding why it does not conform and how this particular middle contributes to the imitation of a providential action. In conceding that the Poetics is not occupied with temporality, Ricoeur offers us another way of phrasing the problem: "If therefore the internal connection of the plot is logical rather than chronological, what logic is it?" (Time and Narrative 1: 40). My concern is with the uniqueness of Milton's answer to this question in Samson Agonistes. Let us consider how his critics have answered it.

In a paper presented posthumously to the British Academy in 1908, Sir Richard Jebb responds to Dr. Johnson by identifying Samson's despair as a force of causation which moves the action forward. The agency of character which Jebb emphasizes is, moreover, a distinctive feature of classical tragedy: "The action is, indeed, a still action, because the force which is to produce the catastrophe is the inward force of Samson's own despair, not an external necessity pressing upon him. Precisely the same is the case in the Prometheus Vinctus of Aeschylus, a drama consisting, like Samson Agonistes, of a series of interviews" (177). Jebb proceeds to the question of the "spirit" of the poem by evaluating its proximity to the traits of "hebraism" and "hellenism" as these terms apply to Milton's artistic temperament. The question hinges upon the difference between the Hellenic idea of fate and Milton's conception of providence. Hellenic drama, in Jebb's view, is characterized by "an ideal grandeur of agony depending on a real agony of contrast. The contrast . . . between man and fate"

(179). While the Hebrews believe in a personal and immediate God who acts on behalf of his people, the Greeks believe in an "inexorable, external necessity . . . . a superhuman controlling power" (179) which is in conflict with human freedom. Hence "Hellenism contrasts man with fate. Hebraism contrasts God and his servants with idols and their servants" (180). Insofar as fate and providence are not identical or reconcilable, the spirit of Hellenic tragedy is foreign to Samson Agonistes.

Jebb's paper identifies three distinct aspects of the poem which have occupied critics ever since. First, by emphasizing the importance of Samson's despair, Jebb tacitly distinguishes the psychological and spiritual events which are internal to Samson from the external events in the poem. Secondly, by proposing Samson's despair as a causal agent, Jebb appears to draw the action closer to Aristotle's idea of probability. Thirdly, by probing for the real "spirit" of the poem, he deals with the unavoidable tensions between classical and Christian perspectives on the nature of action, suffering and heroism. While "spirit" might appear at first to be a nebulous term, Jebb very usefully implies its definition as a function of the motive of theodicy which embraces and centralizes, from the point of view of my own study, the location of action and suffering in time and history. The three aspects of the poem which Jebb's study engages are certainly interrelated both in themselves and in the new questions they give rise to. These questions include the abrogation of tragedy by the Christian concept of redemption, the evocation of the tragic emotions of fear and pity and their catharsis if catharsis is produced in part by the kind of plot Aristotle approves of, and the nature of plot itself as that which orders, shapes and relates events in time. These questions have also divided critics, yet as questions they are fundamentally linked.

Classical and Christian criteria diverge in the two major statements which succeed Jebb's pronouncements. William Riley Parker (Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes, 1937) traces Milton's use of the corpus of Greek tragedy and presents Milton as the successor to Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.

F. Michael Krouse (Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition, 1949) places Samson Agonistes in an ideological context which consists of seventeen centuries of Christian exegesis. Parker equates the sense of suffering in Samson Agonistes with the spirit of Greek tragedy, and even suggests that Milton's poem conveys a sense of tragic waste. More importantly, his orientation requires him to reconcile the concepts of fate and providence which Jebb took pains to distinguish:

> 'Fate,' we are told in the Christian Doctrine, 'can be nothing but a divine decree emanating from some almighty power.' This puts clearly what little difference there is between the general conception of Fate in Greek Tragedy and 'Fate' in Samson Agonistes. Milton evidently would make synonymous the universal law of justice and God. . . . Fate is a mysterious divine decree, to both Milton and the Greeks. (213)

As Parker points out, the word "fate" does not appear in Samson Agonistes, yet Milton's use of the word in other poems does not seem to me to build Parker's case. When, in the "Nativity Ode," "wisest Fate" overrules human expectation and foresees the sacrifice of the "bitter cross," we recognize that redemption is a gift and is not subject to necessity. And when God in Paradise Lost declares that "what I will is Fate," his statement precedes the Son's free offer to ransom fallen humanity. Like Boethius in The Consolation of Philosophy, Milton shows that Fate is Providence misconceived and misread, for the perfect freedom with which it acts reflects the perfect freedom it seeks to achieve for humankind.

In the course of establishing his own emphasis, Krouse argues that Parker's study is not adequately historicized: he implies that the Sophocles of Renaissance commentary and interpretation would inevitably be a "*Sophocles Christianus*," meaning that the relationship of Samson Agonistes to Greek tragedy is complicated by Christian attitudes to the classics. For Krouse, the formation of Milton's sensibility by centuries of Christian tradition would fundamentally alter his conception of tragedy:

> Samson, it is true, must sacrifice himself in his ultimate fulfilment of the mission for which he was promised, and it is in that human sense that the meaning of the poem is tragic. . . . It is a tragedy, and in the Greek acceptation of that term, in form as well as in human meaning; but it is a

> Greek tragedy written by an unyielding Christian poet living in England when the tradition of Christianity was seventeen hundred years old. For this reason we may not ignore the fact that Samson is finally victorious over God's enemies because he withstands temptation. (132)

While creating a Samson who emerges from the full sweep of Christian history, Krouse has, in the last statement of this paragraph, implied a causal link between the middle episodes of the poem and the catastrophe. The argument is ultimately, perhaps, as compromising to Milton's demonstration of the freedom of providential actions as is Parker's equation of providence and fate. Milton's God is neither provoked by Samson's successes nor constrained by his failures: He is the source of a freedom greater than our own logic.

Other critics have sought to reconcile the classical and Christian elements in the poem. This approach is apparent in A.S.P. Woodhouse's conviction that tragic effect is present in Samson Agonistes.:

> Every great poet adapts form to content in his own way. But the basic classical structure common to Milton and Sophocles is peculiarly effective because the framework which it supplies for every subtlety of insight and modification still retains its beautiful clarity and its insistent suggestion of inevitability. Here the true importance of Milton's adaptation of his classical models finally lies. It is not that he is seeking to reproduce their spirit and effect -- far from it -- but that he is adapting their means to present and produce his own. (466)

The closing lines of the poem, for example, offer a remarkable formulation of Aristotelian catharsis, indicating that Milton,"with his basic Christian assumptions ... still produced a genuinely tragic effect" (459). Woodhouse argues that within the divine comedy of the Christian vision of redemption there is "plenty of room for tragic episodes" (463) because "Christianity never denies the power of sin and suffering, though it envisions an escape from them" (463).

The role of Samson's inward despair is pursued further by Don Cameron Allen ("The Problem of Christian Despair in Samson Agonistes," 1954) who centers the poem "on the regeneration of a desperate man and includes in its circular scope all of the theological dicta on the genesis and cure of despair' (186). Subsequent critics have aligned the pattern of regeneration Allen proposes specifically with the theology of regeneration Milton outlines in the Christian Doctrine (I:XVIII). The "regenerationist" theory has now become a critical commonplace, and while it is by no means universally accepted, it has enough currency to make possible statements such as this one by Raymond Waddington: "Start with what we can all agree upon. The problem of Dr. Johnson's middle has been reduced with almost universal recognition that the process of Samson's spiritual regeneration constitutes the action preceding the catastrophe" (259). The regenerationist position is made more attractive by its implied resolution of the tensions between Christian and classical traditions as it argues for the perfect synthesis of Christian meaning and classical form. Anthony Low presents Milton as such a synthesizer:

> That the reader must make a synthesis in the case of *Samson* is not surprising, because Milton was himself a synthesizer, who had the ability to take an enormous diversity of material and make it his own. Thus, for example, we shall see that Samson makes use of the basic five-act Greek structure, and also of the traditional five stages of Christian regeneration: conviction of sin, contrition, confession, departure from evil, conversion to good. . . . At the highest level, the literatures of the Greeks, Hebrews, and Christians are far from incompatible. In spite of their obvious differences, the visions toward which they strive have much in common. (4)

The stages in the process of regeneration make the middle episodes of the poem appear progressive with each stage bringing a new and necessary preparation for Samson's restoration as the servant of God and deliverer of Israel.

Problems of form and content, structure and spirit, the synthesis and divergence of separate traditions, persist in contemporary studies of the poem in ways which show the influence and importance of earlier debates. Joseph Wittreich (Interpreting Samson Agonistes, 1986) begins by surveying modern critical positions in order to depart from them. The structure of Wittreich's study presents Samson in a sequence of historical and ideological contexts in a manner which emulates the structure of Krouse's Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition precisely in order to criticize it. While Krouse aligns Milton's Samson with the dominant mainstream of Christian commentary, Wittreich summons a form of New Historicist methodology to present evidence of a less obvious but widely disseminated negative image of Samson which priorizes a "contrastive" typology over Krouse's more favorable "comparative" assessment of the relation between Samson and Christ. "Once the received typology is eroded," Wittreich argues, "Samson can be scrutinized anew as a fallen, tragic figure from whom God hides and to whom light is now darkness" (43).

Wittreich's Milton is a prophetic writer, and the prophet's task is to postulate "a providential pattern for a creation that in the course of history has become deformed" (Visionary Poetics 26). Wittreich consistently applies Milton's treatment of genre, whether epic, tragedy, or the "transcendent" genre of prophecy based on the model of Revelation, to the image of history they portray and thereby offer to the reader. For Wittreich, Samson is a type of false prophet, and Samson Agonistes is a "warning" prophecy, for it should lead us to reject the actions and ethics of its central figure (Visionary Poetics 194-204). From this perspective, tragedy by definition portrays the binding down of human energy to a pattern of endless cyclic recurrence from which Christ provides release (Visionary Poetics 207). The choice between Samson and Christ is absolute and uncompromising and Wittreich discourages any positive typological association between them.

Criticism which considers the typology of Samson Agonistes should bear witness to the paradoxes which inhere in Samson's experience, paradoxes which are expressed through the phenomenon of "doubleness" in Samson's psyche and in the many of the features of the poem. This phenomenon receives due attention from Kathleen Swaim. This phenomenon can also be treated as an Augustinian pattern of temporality by applying Ricoeur's perceptive assessment of the Confessions as a "dialectic of the sinner and the created being" to Samson Agonistes. This pattern certainly complicates Wittreich's reading, for a central position in Milton's theodicy is

God's involvement with his creation. The prologue establishes Samson as a microcosm of creation, a "little world made cunningly" as Donne puts it, and we learn by the exode that God cannot, and would not, "hide" from Samson the sinner without hiding from Samson the created being.

John Shawcross pursues the "doubleness" of the poem into the problem of genre by suggesting that there are in fact two versions of tragedy in this poem. One is the "tragedy of the self, the individual man subject to temptation, to waste, and to blindness in his understanding of self and life" (295). The second version which distinguishes Samson Agonistes from Greek and Elizabethan precedents is the "tragedy of hope":

> The hero in such a tragedy should exhibit hope, in the present or in the past, in the meaningfulness of action, and the ending of such a tragedy should suggest to those who remain that things will be righted in the future after the drama is completed, and that evil will be exposed and defeated again. (296)

If Samson is a "little world" his life is, as we have already witnessed, a "little history," for it is the unique burden of Samson as a tragic figure to magnify the history of his people in his own experience, and this experience has as much to do with failure as deliverance, forgetting as remembering. Samson lives out the pattern of exodus which is his greatest historic point of reference along with the creation, yet hope is limited because there is nothing permanent or in a sense even communal about Samson's victory. It is characteristic of tragedy to leave the surviving community on the plane of time and history where the tragic pattern -- in this case new failures and a new deliverance -- can be repeated. The higher, transformed community consists of individuals who have known the pattern in isolation and solitude. Yet the poem continues to hope, or to ask, as it were, Von Rad's optimistic and pessimistic question in his commentary on Judges: "where is the one who serves his people as deliverer not merely on one occasion alone?" (I:329).

Critics who oppose Samson's status as a genuine type of Christ give priority to the moral and ethical significance of Samson's actions, especially his final action at the pillars. Among these critics, Irene Samuel bases her case primarily on Aristotle's conception of tragedy which, if characterized, as Milton says in the preface, by its gravity, morality and seriousness, must by its nature comment negatively on Samson's deeds, specifically by refusing to condone or accept an act of vengeance.[1] Her evaluation of the relation between genre and its ethical view is uncompromising: "Milton called Samson Agonistes a tragedy, not a martyr play; its subject cannot be Samson restored to divine favor" (239). In making her case, Samuel recognizes that "Milton need not have been a strict Aristotelian in his view of tragedy" but observes that "Milton cites no theorist on tragedy but Aristotle in his prefatory note to *Samson* " (240). Technically this is correct, but it leaves us with a very restricted view of the preface. David Pareus is a theologian and not a theorist of tragedy, yet both the preface to Samson Agonistes and the Reason of Church Government make it clear that Pareus' commentary on Revelation was long a part of Milton's ruminations on tragedy (Hughes 669). Yet Milton is not reaching for the authority of Pareus to set against the authority of Aristotle. Rather, like the Son in Paradise Regained, he reaches through Pareus to the authority of the Bible itself as a source of literary models as well as of stories. What is more, the preface explicitly places the authority of the practitioners of tragedy above theorists both ancient and modern:

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[1] Paul Ricoeur suggests that Aristotle's distinction between the "universals" conveyed in poetry and the "particulars" conveyed in history reflects the moral and ethical character of tragedy. "The kind of universality that a plot calls for derives from its ordering, which brings about its completeness and wholeness. The universals a plot engenders are not Platonic ideas. They are universals related to practical wisdom, hence to ethics and politics. A plot engenders such universals when the structure of its action rests on the connections internal to the action and not on external accidents. These internal connections as such are the beginning of universalization" (Time and Narrative 1: 41). Based on this observation, we should expect Milton to construct a plot which engenders the "practical wisdom" of patience, which implies waiting, not upon a train of visitors, but upon the manifestation of providence.The absence of a causal relationship between the encounters with Manoa, Dalila and Harapha and the "rouzing motions" of divine grace is therefore consistent with Milton's purpose.

> Of the style and uniformity, and that commonly call'd the Plot, whether intricate or explicit, which is nothing indeed but such economy, or disposition of the fable as may stand best with verisimilitude and decorum; they only will best judge who are not unacquainted with *Aeschylus*, *Sophocles*, and *Euripides*, the three Tragic Poets unequall'd yet by any, and the best rule to all who endeavor to write Tragedy.

The preface has generally been received as both an apology for dramatic poetry as well as a commitment to the rigors of the classical model. The preface might also be read as an emancipation from received notions about the composition of tragedy, for it is precisely on the subject of plot, which Aristotle calls the "soul" of tragedy and sets as the highest principle of its definition, that Milton guides us away from Aristotle towards the tragic poets themselves. He thereby opens questions which Dr. Johnson closes. Milton was well versed in the neo-Aristotelian commentaries of the Italian Renaissance[2] -- works which in some respects culminate in Dr. Johnson's eighteenth century pressure of prescription -- yet the preface, and, more importantly, the poem itself, release us from logical and critical predispositions and encourage us to witness its own logic, its own internal relatedness which imitate an action reflective of a vision of time.

Before considering how the internal relations of the poem both imitate and reflect Milton's conception of providential action in time, we must look further at existing critical approaches to the problem of biblical or Christian tragedy. Christian tragedy has long been considered a paradoxical and self-contradictory term. Shawcross points out that regeneration, if this is what takes place in the middle episodes, "gets in the way of the tragic label" (290) while Martin Mueller contends that tragic vision is possible because the action of the poem is distant in time from the

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[2] The nature of this influence is traced by Raymond Waddington in "Melancholy Against Melancholy: Samson Agonistes as Renaissance Tragedy" and by Mary-Ann Radzinowicz in Towards Samson Agonistes (8-14).

Incarnation: "Hence the events begin to resonate with a significance that remains opaque to the participants and is very far from abolishing the darkness of tragedy in a blaze of revelation" (Children of Oedipus 211-212). Yet the poem is read in "A.D." that is, on the opposite side of the decisive mid-point of Christian history from the characters in Samson Agonistes, and this awareness is perhaps unavoidably a part of our response.

The title "Nativity Ode" also juxtaposes a Christian event with a classical form, yet it is the view of life conveyed in tragedy which makes the merger of the classical and the Christian especially difficult in Samson Agonistes. Paradise Lost, however, was originally conceived as the tragedy of "Adam Un'Paradis'd," and as John Steadman has shown the epic retains many of the structural features of tragedy and even deals, as many eighteenth century commentators complained, with an apparently tragic action.

But the Fall in Paradise Lost is subsumed within a prophetic account of history which is based upon the outline of providential history described by Augustine in the City of God, a book which was written to make sense of the reversals and catastrophes of earthly history. The angelic figures who articulate pre-cosmic and post-Fall history in Paradise Lost are not admitted into the temporally and generically restricted framework of Samson Agonistes. The angel who announces Samson's destiny at his nativity serves a prophetic function, yet this prophecy is a fragment, made especially partial in Judges by the phrase "*begin* to deliver" (Milton's Samson says "should deliver" in hindsight), in comparison to the clarity and scope of the vision in Paradise Lost.

The relation of genre to temporality dependsa in large measure upon describing the internal relations between the various parts of the poem. At the same time, the biblical or Christian dimension in the poem appears to authorize the reader to seek the completion of the action in a pattern larger than, and external to, the action. In the same sense, the temporal experience of Adam in Paradise Lost is both brief and tragic, yet he does not remain a passive observer of the vision of history he receives in Books XI-XII. He is, rather, encouraged to cultivate an authority which allows him to describe the relationships between the various scenes he witnesses, an authority which is equivalent to Milton's belief, expressed in the Epistle which begins the Christian Doctrine (YP:118), in individual conscience as the sole arbiter and interpreter of scripture. This authority is communal and not isolating, however; it makes the collaboration between Adam and Michael prototypical of a community of interpreters. The same function is implied, within the limits tragedy imposes, in the fifth act of Samson Agonistes when, after hearing of the catastrophe, a community consisting of Manoa, the Chorus and the Messenger reconstructs, interprets and transmits the story of Samson. Interpretation thus takes on thematic significance in both the epic and the tragic poem. In the tragic poem, however, because it is rigorously limited to the human point of view, orientation in a larger, providential pattern is more the object of a quest than a knowledge conferred: the Incarnation which Adam perceives with a sort of visionary wonder exceeds the grasp of the characters in Samson Agonistes, yet its characters do grasp. In spite of these limitations, the wealth of psalmic and prophetic allusion in Samson Agonistes, as well as its reliance on other modes of expression in the Bible, are sufficient to convey the scope of providential history as being latent in Samson's personal experience.

The location of Samson's experience within a larger, more comprehensive pattern implies the preservation of a positive typological association between Samson and Christ which Wittreich's study reappraises and erodes. Typological interpretation finds the fulfilment of Samson's identity and purpose in relation to the figure of Christ notwithstanding Samson's shortcomings and failures, for as William Madsen, among others, has argued, there "must be differences as well as similarities between a type and its antitype" (221). A second emphasis in typological interpretation, supported by exegetical traditions which link Judges to Revelation (Lewalski "The 'Tragedy' of the Apocalypse), considers Samson's experience in light of Revelation which portrays the resolution and completion of the history of which Samson is a part. While history is primary to this line of interpretation, it continues the problem of tragic form through the Renaissance interest in the literary quality and structure of Revelation, an interest Milton himself clearly pursued and which is elaborated most fully in the commentaries he undoubtedly read, namely those of David Pareus (A Commentary Upon the Divine Revelation tr. 1644) and Joseph Mede (The Key of Revelation tr. 1643).

The influence of apocalyptic writings and commentaries on Revelation on Milton's poetry has received much attention from scholars. In the case of Samson Agonistes, this area of study manifests, not surprisingly, the same division of opinion which typifies comment on this poem, particularly if one compares the work of Barbara Lewalski ("The 'Tragedy' of the Apocalypse") to that of Joseph Wittreich (Visionary Poetics). By rooting his conception of the tragic in an image of history and a negative typology of Samson, Wittreich follows the work of critics such as John Carey and Irene Samuel and opposes the positions of William Madsen, Mary-Ann Radzinowicz, and Barbara Lewalski. Yet his use of scholarship on apocalyptic thought and writing is exceptional only in the case of Samson Agonistes: elsewhere he applies it to a view of "Lycidas" as paradigmatic of an authentic prophetic writing which finds fuller expression in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained. His work on Samson Agonistes makes him in many respects the heir of Stanley Fish, for, like Fish on Paradise Lost, Wittreich regards Samson Agonistes as a trap or snare for the complacent reader.

The social, political and literary influence of apocalyptic thought in the seventeenth century comprises a vast subject area: my purpose in observing it is to locate Milton's distinctive approach to it in relation to my own critical project which bears at this stage upon the internal criterion of plot which, in the case of Samson Agonistes, diverges from Aristotle's norms because it is conditioned by a view of time which was foreign to Aristotle. I will emphasize those aspects of apocalyptic criticism which support and anticipate my own conclusions.

Samson Agonistes is a poem which establishes and explores a series of dialectical tensions which both mirror and constitute the dissonances of experiential time. And this is precisely the basis of the affinity between Milton's poem and Revelation. This affinity is well defined in a contemporary discussion of Revelation by Adela Yarbro Collins:

> The task of Revelation was to overcome the unbearable tension perceived by the author between what was and what ought to have been. His purpose was to create that tension for readers unaware of it, to heighten it for those who felt it already, and then to overcome it in an act of literary imagination. In the literary creation which is the Apocalypse, the tension between what was and what ought to be is manifest in the opposition between symbols of God's rule and symbols of Satan's rule, between symbols of the authority and power of Christ and symbols of the authority and power of Caesar. (Crisis and Catharsis 141)

The contest "twixt God and Dagon" in Samson Agonistes is an instance of the conflict in Revelation as Collins describes it, yet this observation is not designed to label the figures in Samson Agonistes by appropriating them to another text but rather to note the capacity of Revelation, in its mythic structure, to comprehend the conflicts of history in their local or "circumscribed" reference. As Collins describes it:

> When one reflects upon the symbols of the Apocalypse in the light of its historical situation, one sees that its task is to overcome the intolerable tension between reality and hopeful faith. Sociologists speak of such tension as cognitive dissonance, a state of mind that arises when when there is great disparity between expectations and reality. Tension between what is and what ought to be is reflected in Revelation in the sharp contradiction set up between symbols and sets of symbols. All living beings are given a place in a dualistic structure. (141)

This capacity of Revelation to comprehend and define historical conflict explains its enduring appeal as both what Frank Kermode calls "naive apocalypse," which is manifest in a popular literature which proclaims a literal and imminent end, and as a model for great poets such as Langland, Spenser, Milton, Blake and others who seek to clarify the form of providential history. Wittreich, however, sees Samson Agonistes as witnessing "myth mutilated into tragedy" while in Paradise Regained we "envision mythology modulating into history" (Interpreting Samson Agonistes 115). But the poem unquestionably sustains the "sharp contradiction between symbols and sets of symbols" and the dualities which Collins perceives in Revelation, features which, she argues, distinguish it as a species of "mythic narrative" (142). The central symbols which the poem opposes are focused by the encounter between Samson and Harapha in which Milton contrasts Samson's body, as a symbol of the human form created in the image of God, with the spears and other weapons made by men. This essential opposition, which is made clearer in the poem's catastrophe which opposes a temple of stone to a temple of flesh, argues against the suggestion that Samson Agonistes is merely demonic parody of Revelation.

In Milton's era Revelation was used to justify the Reformation as an event of providential history by casting the Church of Rome in the role of Antichrist. Pareus advances this purpose in his commentary, and Milton's earlier prose treatises participate in it. In particular, the prayer which concludes Of Reformation is, as C.A. Patrides says, "tantamount to an interpretation of history in full alignment with the common apocalyptic expectations of Protestantism" ("Apocalyptic Configurations" 223). The final paragraphs in particular, which divide into prayers for rewards for the righteous and tribulation for the opponents of righteousness, resemble those psalms which also end with appeals for the destruction of enemies, a biblical model which may in turn have authorized the apparent "double outcome" of Samson Agonistes as it rewards the good and punishes the wicked in a manner which Aristotle felt detracted from the true essence of tragedy.

Patrides notes that Milton's "response to the millennium was in time qualified further still by a decreasing emphasis on its imminence and an increasing emphasis on its spiritual aspects" (226). This qualification is based upon the "transfer of the cosmic battle within the soul of man " (226) and is expressed in the endings of all three of the major poems which, in portraying human figures either embarking on or continuing their temporal journeys, reflect a realistic appraisal of the reader's position in the midst of history. Two elements focus Milton's use of Revelation in Samson Agonistes, and each may perhaps be logically attributed to his departure from a radical and literal expectation of apocalyptic fulfilment in his own era. The first is the development of the ethic of patient heroism, discernible throughout Milton's canon but most fully expressed in his major poems, as a sensitivity to times and actions ordained by God. The Chorus in Samson Agonistes argues that, while God might be expected to summon a deliverer to "quell the mighty of the earth," patience is the highest form of wisdom for all people irrespective of their unique calling or situation:

> But patience is more oft the exercise
> Of saints, the trial of their fortitude,
> Making them each his own deliverer
> And victor over all
> That tyranny or fortune can inflict. (1288-1291)

The lines surely allude to Revelation 13:10: "Here is the patience and the faith of the saints." The entire speech by the Chorus from which this passage is taken establishes a contrast between the patience of the saints and the "plain heroic Magnitude of mind" which they perceive in Samson's courageous but possibly mistimed or misguided challenge to Harapha. The speech does not therefore imply, as many critics suggest, that Samson is now fully prepared to act as God's champion. The contrast between power and patience in the Chorus' speech develops the opposition which Samson himself establishes in the prologue: "what is strength without a double share/ Of wisdom?" Samson's initiative cannot of itself reconcile the imbalance or synthesize the virtues. The position of the encounter with Harapha in the sequence of middle episodes is very significant. The episode reaffirms the futility of any occasion which is not providentially ordained.

The second element involves an increased attention to the aesthetic model of Revelation as a clarification of the wisdom and sensitivity of patience expressed in the pattern of its own internal relations rather than its correlation to unique political circumstances. This emphasis is present in Milton's citation of Pareus, who considered Revelation the "image of a high and stately tragedy." Pareus describes the text of Revelation as "Epistolarie," but its prophetic visions, which begin in the fourth chapter, take the form of a drama:

> But that which beginneth at the fourth Chapter (which is the first propheticall Vision) and the following unto the end, if you well observe them, have plainly a *Dramaticall* forme, hence the Revelation may truely be called a *Propheticall Drama*, show, or representation. For as in humane Tragedies, diverse persons one after another come upon the Theatre to represent things done, and so again depart: diverse Chores also or Companies of Musitians and Harpers distinguish the diversity of the *Acts*, and while the *Actors* hold up, do with musicall accord sweeten the wearinesse of the spectators: so verily the thing it selfe speaketh that in this Heavenly Interlude, by diverse *shewes* and *apparitions* are represented diverse Chores or Companies, one while of 24. *Elders* and *four Beast*, another while of Angels, sometimes of *Sealed ones in their foreheads*, and sometimes of *Harpers*, &c. with *new Songs*, and worthy *Hymnes*, not so much to lessen the wearisomnesse of the Spectators, as to infuse holy meditations into the minds of the Readers, and to lift them up to Heavenly matters. (20)

Dramatical representation becomes God's means of "exhibiting to Iohns sight or hearing those things in the Heavenly Theatre, which God would have him understand . . . touching the future state of the Church" (20). The visions are expressed through "Typical speeches or actions" which "shaddow out, not a few Ages only after the Revelation: nor yet the last times and Tragedie of Antichrist alone, but the whole period of the Church" (21-22).

While the sufferings of the elect church in every age and the final downfall of Antichrist at the end of time provide a plot for tragedy, Pareus likens Revelation to tragedy primarily because it consists of acts divided by choral interludes and is presented as if in a heavenly theatre. Division into acts, scenes and interludes imposes an external dramatic format on Revelation. So too does the five act structure of Samson Agonistes retain the traditional format of Greek tragedy, yet this format does not answer questions about reversal, recognition and catastrophe which define the internal structure of plot. For Pareus, the plot of Revelation is a function of its central conflict which, as Lewalski describes it, consists of the "Church's (and the elect Christian's) tragic suffering and agony throughout all ages" as well as the Church "in the militant stance of the tragic protagonist engaged in constant agons against opposing forces" (1052). The visions Pareus describes, however, do not advance in a causal progression but are instead a sequence of separable explorations of the same conflict. As Michael Murrin points out, "Pareus did not consider the structure of the whole. He perceived the dramatic quality of the 'plot' but read it discontinuously" (135). Murrin concludes that Pareus' model places some strain on the text, yet a series of discrete perspectives on the same conflict is apparent in the text as Adela Yarbro Collins suggests: "Each series is distinctive in its particular formulations of character and plot. Beneath this variety of surface texture, however, is the same formal structure. In each series the contradiction between followers of the Lamb and followers of the beast is presented and overcome by the triumph of the Lamb" (142). As a gloss upon the structure of Samson Agonistes, therefore, and especially its problematic middle, the structure of Revelation suggests that the middle episodes of Milton's poem need only examine the same underlying conflict, which they do repeatedly, and need not convey the logical or probable progression Aristotle requires. Samson's downfall is the psychic centre of each of the middle episodes, and the drama finally expresses God's act of recentering Samson's consciousness through the "motions" of grace. In the same way, the prophetical vision Adam receives in Paradise Lost XI-XII is designed to displace the forbidden tree which has become the centre of his consciousness with the cross.

The view of Revelation as heavenly theatre also bears upon Milton's treatment of genre in Samson Agonistes. The sense of life as a cosmic drama, which continues from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance, is especially intense in scenes of judgment and martyrdom in literature, as is apparent in Shakespeare's treatment of Cordelia's banishment in King Lear or Bunyan's account of the trial of Faithful in the Pilgrim's

Progress. The theatrical quality of Revelation also influenced John Foxe's Actes and Monuments which describes the comportment of protestant martyrs in their trials and punishments (Murrin 134).

E.R. Curtius discovers antecedents for the metaphor of the theatrum mundi in both classical and Christian traditions (138-144). Specifically, he cites I Corinthians 9:9 as a Christian source of the metaphor: "For I think God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men." Incidental to this is Milton's observation in the preface that "The *Apostle* Paul himself thought it not unworthy to insert a verse of Euripides into the Text of Holy Scripture, I Cor. XV, 33." The metaphor is used extensively by Shakespeare in English literature, and Kermode suggests that apocalyptic overtones in native English tragedy reveal it as the successor of medieval apocalyptic dramas (The Sense of an Ending 30). Milton's prefatory remarks on tragic drama cause Samson Agonistes to stand self-consciously apart from the native tradition of English drama. Insofar as the poem was never intended for the stage, however, we should note the presence and development of the metaphor of theatre within Milton's canon.The idea of theatre, specifically the concept of apocalyptic theatre, is pronounced even in Milton's earliest poems, especially the "Nativity Ode" and "Lycidas," and continues to develop throughout his canon. Furthermore, the metaphor of theatre is integral to a poetry which asserts the "better fortitude of patience," that is, which is designed to bear witness to providential action in the theatre of history.

Drawing upon the "sharp contradiction" of opposed symbols in Revelation, Milton engages his drama in the opposition of two forms of theatre which reflect two opposed assertions about the nature of time. We have already encountered these assertions about time: one is an idolatrous sabbath and the other the "Day of the Lord" of Old Testament prophecy. The opposed forms of theatre which reflect these assertions are pagan spectacle on the one hand and cosmic (meaning also miercocosmic) drama on the other, and the drama unfolds in the very midst of the spectacle. The spectacle is a staged, choreographed public exhibition of which Samson's performance, while the highlight, is but one of many episodes. Apart from the brutality and degradation featured in spectacles, their strongly visual nature is featured in their censure by the Church Fathers. In his Confessions, Augustine recalls a friend's failure to resist watching a battle between two gladiators in Rome:

> . . . he opened his eyes, and his soul was stabbed with a wound more deadly than any which the gladiator, whom he was so anxious to see, had received in his body. . . . this was presumption, not courage. The weakness of his soul was in relying upon itself instead of trusting in you. (VI:8)

The passage serves to contrast with Augustine's inner search with the illuminated eye of memory: "For the light was within, while I looked on the world outside" (VIII:7). Tertullian also describes the frenzy which results from witnessing spectacles:

> No one ever approaches a pleasure such as this without passion; no one experiences this passion without its damaging effects. . . . Look at the populace, frenzied even as it comes to the show, already in violent commotion, blind, wildly excited over its wagers. (Spectacles: 15-16)

The Semichorus describes the same frenzy in the Philistines present at Dagon's temple:

> While their hearts were jocund and sublime
> Drunk with Idolatry, drunk with Wine,
> And fat regorg'd of Bulls and Goats,
> Chanting thir Idol, and preferring
> Before our living Dread who dwells
> In Silo his bright Sanctuary:
> Among them hee a spirit of frenzy sent,
> Who hurt thir minds,
> And urg'd them on with mad desire
> To call in haste for thir destroyer;
> They only set on sport and play
> Unwittingly importun'd
> Thir own destruction to come speedy upon them. (1669-1681)

The catastrophe obviously dissolves the occasion of the pagan sabbath. Yet the dissolution of one assertion about time and the revelation of another is also worked out on the levels of plot structure, tragic convention, and language to which we now return.

Augustine's Confessions offers a paradigm of Christian temporality, and Samson Agonistes can be approached in light of Augustine's emphasis on memory, confession, orientation through allusion, and the metaphors of pilgrimage and quest, all of which define his search for insight. In discovering the meaning of time, however, Augustine also discovers its limitations, for it is a discordant and fragmented element which by its nature imposes a separation from God who enters time through the Incarnation to treat both humanity and time as objects of redemption. In Time and Narrative, Ricoeur compares Aristotle's Poetics to Augustine's Confessions, and sets up Aristotle's concept of plot as a reply to Augustine's concept of time as the distention of the soul:

> Augustine groaned under the existential burden of discordance. Aristotle discerns in the poetic act par excellence -- the composing of the tragic poem -- the triumph of concordance over discordance. It goes without saying that it is I, the reader of Augustine and Aristotle, who establishes this relationship between a lived experience where discordance rends concordance and an eminently verbal experience where concordance mends discordance. (31)

Ricoeur juxtaposes these texts for the purpose of his own theoretical project. Yet there is little question that both texts collide in the practical example of Samson Agonistes in a way which provides, not a purified or idealized theory of their influence on Milton's practice, but rather a valuable and useful anatomy of the temporal forces which shape the poem. How these two authors and their texts converge in Milton's poem, bringing with them their respective methods of containing and accounting for the ruptures and dissonances of experiential time within a general implication of time's wholeness, provides a necessary basis for a direct response to the complaints of Dr. Johnson and other critics.

The epigraph to the preface to Samson Agonistes quotes Aristotle's definition of tragedy: "Tragoedia est imitatio actionis seriae, etc. per misericordiam at metium perficiens talium affectuum lustrationem." "Tragedy, then is an imitation of an action that is serious and complete and has sufficient size . . . presented by those who act and not by narrative, exciting pity and fear, bringing about the catharsis of such emotions" (VI: 49b20). Dr. Johnson speculates that Aristotle would have approved of the beginning and the ending of Samson Agonistes but that the middle is inferior. Kermode suggests, as a general premise, that endings carry a unique if not greater burden in the conveyance of a "fiction of concord" (59), and the Chorus in Samson Agonistes which, as a public voice functions as an important reflector of our responses, seems to agree:

> All is best, though we oft doubt,
> What th' unsearchable dispose
> Of highest wisdom brings about,
> And ever best found in the close. (1745-1748)

A close reading of the poem reveals that its Hebrew characters are intensely "end" conscious: the term "end" becomes a motif as it recurs no less than fifteen times in the course of the drama:

> This only thought hope relieves me, that the strife
> With mee hath end. (461-462)
>
> His pardon I implore; but as for life,
> To what end should I seek it? (521-522)
>
> Here rather let me drudge and earn my bread,
> Till vermin or the draff of servile food
> Consume me, and oft-invocated death
> Hast'n the welcome end of all my pains. (573-576)
>
> My race of glory run, and race of shame,
> And I shall shortly be with them that rest. (597-598)
>
> Just or unjust, alike seem miserable,
> For oft alike, both come to evil end. (705-705)
>
> I thought where all thy circling wiles would end
> In feign'd Religion, smooth hypocrisy. (871-872)
>
> Love quarrels oft in pleasing concord end,
> Not wedlock-treachery endangering life. (1008-1009)
>
> Yet so it may fall out, because thir end
> is hate, not help to me (1265-1266)

For Aristotle, the ending of tragedy involves the necessary or probable outcome of the interplay between character and circumstance, especially when the weak or flawed side of human nature, to which the character in his pride is blind, is active. For the characters in Samson Agonistes, the ending, even if it reveals Samson tangled "in the fold of dire necessity," must be read as the fulfilment of an identity which is divinely promised and divinely realized.

The Poetics is occupied with questions of form and order and is not preoccupied with time. It is in the Physics, speaking as a scientist rather than as an aesthetician, that Aristotle sees time as the "measure of motion." Ricoeur allows that time is not an explicit concern of the Poetics: "the 'logic' of emplotment discourages any consideration of time, even when it implies concepts such as beginning, middle and end, or when it becomes involved in a discourse about the magnitude or the length of the plot" (Time and Narrative 1: 52). But as Kermode has shown, the consonance of beginning, middle, and end, which is examined in the Poetics, addresses our cultural anxieties about the form of time itself:

> For concord or consonance really is the root of the matter, even in a world which thinks it can only be a fiction. The theologians revive typology and are followed by the literary critics. We seek to repeat the performance of the New Testament, a book which rewrites and requites another book and achieves harmony with it rather than questioning its truth. . . . We achieve our secular concords of past and present and future, modifying the past and allowing for the future without falsifying our own moment of crisis. We need, and provide, fictions of concord. (59)

Kermode's term "fiction" and Ricoeur's term "narrative" are deliberately broad and designed to encompass the genre of tragedy and the structure of plot. In broadest terms, both theorists describe the transaction between language and time which, notwithstanding Aristotle's indifference to this priority in the Poetics, is central to literary experience which is conditioned by the Bible. We have already considered this transaction in the modes of psalmic and prophetic utterance which are featured in this poem; the former especially reflects the orientation of creation and covenant and the disorientation of the Fall in its modes of praise and lamentation. We have still to articulate this transaction in terms of the relation between the episodes of Samson Agonistes and the structure of its plot.

Ricoeur describes an essentially reciprocal relation between time and narrative: "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal experience" (Time and Narrative 1: 52). By bringing the problem of time in Christian experience as it is described by Augustine into relationship with Aristotle's description of tragedy, Ricoeur makes time a concern of plot in a way which, I would suggest, reflects Milton's, if not Aristotle's, deepest concerns. Within this relationship, plot mediates between time and narrative expression:

> I see in the plots we invent the privileged means by which we re-configure our confused, unformed and at the limit mute temporal experience. "What then is time?" asks Augustine. "I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled." In the capacity of poetic composition to re-figure this temporal experience, which is prey to the aporias of philosophical speculation, resides the referential function of the plot. (Time and Narrative 1: xi)[3]

Applying this model to Samson Agonistes will help us to understand how the plot of Milton's poem fulfils its own, unique referential function. We must begin, however, by establishing the relation between text and time in Augustine's Confessions.

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[3] Ricoeur. let it be remembered, is embarking on his own theoretical project and is not a critic of Milton's poem.. We are discovering, therefore, that the purpose of Milton's plot is based upon a deviation from Aristotle's standards, a deviation which gives rise to Dr. Johnson's famous criticism of the poem. Whereas Kermode regards tragedy, in the native English tradition at least, as the successor to Medieval Apocalyptic dramas, Ricoeur views Apocalypse and tragedy as separate paradigms: "Reversal is magnified by the apocalyptic model to the extent that the end is the catastrophe that abolishes time and prefigures 'the terror of the last days.' Yet the apocalyptic model, in spite of its persistence as attested to by its modern resurgence in the form of utopias or, better, uchronias, is only one paradigm among others, which in no way exhausts the dynamics of narrative" (Time and Narrative 1: 73). Milton, however, accepts the view of Revelation as tragedy espoused by Pareus and Mede, and thereby joins the paradigms and indeed revalues the logic of the Poetics in a *mimesis* of providential action. Ricouer pursues the apocalyptic paradigm further in the first chapter of the second volume of Time and Narrative.

In Book XI of the Confessions Augustine concludes his meditation on the nature of time by seeking the best and closest model of temporal unity and concordance he can find. The model he chooses is a psalm. The psalm is hypothetical or perhaps typical rather than specific, but he may have chosen it in part because the Confessions, in spite of its length, is a self-conscious emulation of psalm poetry in many respects, and therefore finds its own temporal microcosm in a psalm. And indeed, the eleventh chapter which contains the analogy of the psalm is itself a brief model of the text which surrounds it, for the quest for time's meaning serves as an analogy for the quest for the value of his own life. [4] In any case, the psalm is an appropriate choice of model because, as we saw in chapter three, the psalms manifest, thematically and structurally, the permanence of God's actions as against the transience of human effort.

Augustine does not emphasize the entity of the psalm as a model so much as our experience of the psalm in the act of reading. The model itself proceeds out of the problem of how time is measured, for it should be impossible to measure a past which no longer exists or a future which does not yet exist:

> Nevertheless we do measure time. We cannot measure it if it is not yet in being, or if it is no longer in being, or if it has no duration, or if it has no beginning and no end. Therefore we measure neither the future nor the past nor the present nor time that is passing. Yet we do measure time. (XI:27)

The paradox is solved by locating time within human consciousness, rather than in external phenomena, and there dividing and extending it in the threefold dialectic of expectation, attention and memory. The solution is illustrated in the act of reading:

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[4] These are my observations. Ricoeur believes that "Augustine's paradoxes of the experience of time owe nothing to the activity of narrating a story. His key example of reciting a verse or a poem serves to sharpen the paradox rather than resolve it" (Time and Narrative 1: 52). Without his conversion experience his life story would be unredeemably fragmented. Note however that language itself is a conscious engagement in time: Augustine's words are viewed as a temporal response to the Eternal Word. Raphael condescends to the same engagement in his narrative of the War in Heaven. Samson's words seek their relation to the eternal, yet the "seal of silence" he breaks remains the best image of the eternal.

> Suppose that I am going to recite a psalm that I know. Before I begin, my faculty of expectation is engaged by the whole of it. But once I have begun, as much of the psalm as I have removed from the province of expectation and relegated to the past now engages my memory, and the scope of the action I am performing is divided between the two faculties of memory and expectation, the one looking back to the part which I have already recited, the other looking forward to the part which I have still to recite. But my faculty of attention is present all the while, and through it passes what was the future in the process of becoming the past. As the process continues, the province of memory is extended in proportion as that of expectation is reduced, until the whole of my expectation is absorbed. This happens when I have finished my recitation and it has all passed into the province of memory. (XI:27)

This is how the psalm is experienced in reading. Meanwhile reading, which stems in Augustine's discussion from the problem of the experiential measurement of time, offers a reciprocal analogy of temporal experience:

> What is true of the whole psalm is also true of all its parts and of each syllable. It is true of any longer action in which I may be engaged and of which the recitation of the psalm may only be a small part. It is true of a man's whole life, of which all his actions are parts. It is true of the whole history of mankind, of which each man's life is a part. (XI:27)

The wholeness and unity of the psalm is a given which confers, by analogy, wholeness and unity on individual life and history.

Both Aristotle and Augustine, from their own respective vantage points and purposes, imply or affirm the wholeness and concordance of time.[5] We must also recognize that discord, dissonance and temporal ruptures are included within these concepts of wholeness. In the case of Aristotle, the structural feature of *peripeteia* or reversal, which distinguishes the superior "complex" plot from "simple" plots which lack reversals, and which accompanies the change of human fortune which is the nature of tragedy, incorporates a break or division into the structure of the plot. As Kermode defines it, reversal is a "falsification of expectation" in which " the end comes as expected, but not in the manner expected" (58).

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[5] Like Augustine, Aristotle is concerned with the relation between parts and the whole: ". . . the plot, being an imitation of an action, should be concerned with one thing and that a whole, and . . . the parts of the action should be so put together that if one part is shifted or taken away the whole is deranged or disjoined, for what makes no perceptible difference by its presence or absence is no part of the whole" (VIII: 51a16).

Certainly Sophocles' audience knew the story of Oedipus as thoroughly as Milton's readers know the story of Samson and its outcome. In Milton's rendition of Samson's story, however, the middle episodes consist of attempts to link a known past to a hypothetical, never to be realized future in retirement or mortal combat. Only the moment of reversal, specifically, the moment when the "rousing motions" of grace reverse Samson's refusal to attend the Philistine festival, the moment which breaks the relationship between past and future the characters assume, makes the concordant joining of past and future possible. Nevertheless, while reversal appears to comprehend the ruptures and dissonances of temporal experience, it remains a feature of plot and a function of probability and necessity. As such, its appearance in Samson Agonistes does not satisfy Dr. Johnson's complaint about the middle of the poem, for the middle does not provoke the reversal and catastrophe in a way which would satisfy Aristotle. What is the nature of the link between beginning, middle and end in Samson Agonistes? The question leads us back to Augustine.

As we have seen, Augustine offers the text of a psalm as a model for temporal unity and concordance, yet the act of reading the psalm, which illustrates the paradoxes inherent in measuring time, engages the mind in the dialectic of expectation, attention and memory. Time, for example, is not measured as duration reflected in the difference between reading a long poem and a short one:

> . . . this is not an accurate means of measuring time, because it can happen that a short line spoken slowly may take longer to recite than a long one spoken hurriedly. The same applies to a whole poem, a foot, or even a single syllable. It seems to me, then, that time is merely an extension, though of what it is an extension I do not know. I begin to wonder whether it is an extension of the mind itself. (XI:26)

In his treatise on the Trinity, which is so important to the Renaissance idea of memory, Augustine contemplates trinities of human faculties, such as memory, understanding and will, which reflect the image of the triune creator in which they are made. In the earlier Confessions, Augustine recognizes that just as the mind is divided into the modes of expectation, attention and memory in the act of reading, so to is it divided in and by time:

> I see now that my life has been wasted in distractions, but your right hand has supported me in the person of Christ my Lord, the Son of man, who is the Mediator between you, who are one, and men, who are many. He has upheld me in many ways and through many trials, in order that through him I may win the mastery, as he has won the mastery over me, in order that I may be rid of my old temptations and devote myself only to God's single purpose, forgetting what I have left behind. I look forward, not to what lies ahead of me in this life and will surely pass away, but to my eternal goal. I am intent upon this one purpose, not distracted by other aims, and with this goal in view I press on, eager for the prize, God's heavenly summons. Then I shall listen to the sound of your praises and gaze at your beauty ever present, never future, never past. (XI:29)

This passage, which contains five quotations from the Psalms, has already been offered as a gloss on the nature of experiential time in the poem and is now offered as a gloss on its structure. Far from conforming to the causal logic Dr. Johnson demands, the middle episodes of Samson Agonistes imitate and reflect the divided nature of time as Augustine describes it. While each episode centers on a past downfall which reflected the presumption of divine power on Samson's part, the logic of this failure and its consequences is defeated by the larger structure of Milton's "tragic" poem, even as the logic of the Fall is defeated by the larger structure of Paradise Lost. The episodes over which Samson broods so intensely are, after the reversal, apparently forgotten. They are distractions.

The term distraction retains the sense of temptation which is present in the poem. Augustine associates distraction with "old temptations" which prevent him from devoting himself to "God's single purpose." The middle episodes offer to divert Samson from God's purpose before that purpose is even known and understood, and so remind him of his characteristic impulse to act from his own agenda rather than to wait upon God's. Samson is not diverted by these temptations, and for many critics this reflects his growing understanding of patience, and of his readiness to act as God's champion at the appointed time. There are several inconsistencies in this approach, however. First, it overlooks the significance of the Harapha episode during which Samson shows, after two previous "temptations," that he is still prepared to act rashly, regressively, and from his own sense of "occasion." Secondly, it overestimates Samson's ability to act in his present circumstances. Manoa and Dalila are not in a position to deliver what they offer to Samson, and so Samson's "waiting" may have more to do with the absence of choice than with patience. Thirdly, it disregards speech itself as a form of action capable of expressing patience or rashness, wisdom or folly according to its nature, timing and purpose. To appreciate this we need only recall that speech was Samson's undoing when he surrendered his "fort of silence" to Dalila's entreaties.The relation between speech and action, words and deeds, is therefore one of the moral centers of the poem. In order to appreciate the significance of this to the structure of the poem, let us consider the middle episodes more carefully.

In his state of blindness and impotence, the purely verbal nature of Samson's experience is both more intense and more isolating:

> I hear the sound of words, thir sense the air
> Dissolves unjointed ere it reach my ear. (176-177)

He anticipates the "daily" practice of verbal humiliation to ensue, but instead proceeds through encounters with Manoa, Dalila and Harapha as well as the Chorus. The middle episodes present images of Samson in his role as son, husband and warrior and reflect upon how he has failed God in each of these roles. Yet the moral and psychic center of each of these encounters is his downfall at the hands of Dalila. Hence, while the episodes may be divided and discontinuous in relation to the catastrophe, they are related to one another insofar as they provide different perspectives on a single reality which is the event of Samson's downfall. Likewise, the sequence of visions in Books XI-XII of Paradise Lost provides a variety of perspectives on the reality of the Fall, and sequentiality itself becomes a reminder of the repetitiveness of fallen chronology. Beyond both of these structures lies Revelation with its series of visionary perspectives on the underlying conflict of history, and also perhaps the Book of Job which, like Samson Agonistes, both invites and defies the tragic label. Like its biblical models and Augustinian illustrations, Samson Agonistes defines a tragic action in order to break with it, dislocating a pagan temple with the image of an inspired human figure even as Paradise Lost displaces the Forbidden Tree with the Cross. And while the Incarnation extends well beyond Adam's suddenly limited life span, the Cross is, by tradition at least, raised on the same spot as the Forbidden tree, a tradition which collapses time and space in a prophetic experience. As an Old Testament figure whose understanding is limited to the "motions" of grace and is not framed by the whole of scripture, Samson cannot articulate the reality which reorients his consciousness. As in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, however, the action of the poem breaks with the vast weight of a tragic past.

The idea of speech as action is pursued in what several critics have called the "verbal plot" of the poem. Stanley Fish states that a verbal plot, as distinct from a narrative or dramatic plot, is a feature of all of Milton's poetry ("Inaction and Silence" 27). Developing this hypothesis, Leonard Mustazza argues for the precedence of the verbal over the dramatic in the case of Samson Agonistes so that "in effect, language *is* action in the play" (241). Mustazza suggests that the narrative details of the Judges account of Samson " are used for the most part as background material, and the play essentially elaborates upon the deliberate process that occurs prior to Samson's final conflict with the Philistines" (241). The verbal reconstruction of the past which occupies much of the middle episodes as well as the prologue also serves as a thematic analogy to the poet's own task of emplotment. The figures in Samson Agonistes work with the same materials as Milton himself: a matrix consisting of Samson's birth, exploits, and marriages as well as his downfall, blinding and enslavement. Their speeches portray their search for the relatedness of events and inevitably, though not always satisfactorily, pause silently at the apparent inscrutability of Providence:

> Yet stay, let me not rashly call in doubt
> Divine Prediction; what if all foretold
> Had been fulfill'd but through mine own default,
> Whom have I to complain of but myself? (43-46)

Samson's past is a picaresque of deeds which speak "loud" a doer who is not a god but a man for whom divine covenant and promise became a form of license. The lack of connection between the middle episodes makes the middle a temporal microcosm of Samson's life history. In contrast to the silence which united Samson with God, speech manifests the self in isolation and demonstrates the impulses of the fallen will. The transience and dissonance of speech ("I hear the sound of words, thir sense the air/ Dissolves unjointed ere it reach my ear") reflects the same image of time as do the middle episodes.

Yet the action itself is whole and complete by virtue of its way of ending. In spite of the image of time as dissonance and fragmentation which the middle episodes convey, the poem proceeds to alter our understanding of time, language and action through its unique rendering of the structural principle of reversal. It is generally agreed that the reversal occurs at the moment when Samson, prompted by "rousing motions," agrees to attend the Philistine festival even though he has refused the summons three times.[6] The change itself, as distinct from its public declaration by Samson, is silent, interior and imperceptible, for it must occur in the interval between his third refusal and his public expression of the change. This interval is occupied by a debate between Samson and the Chorus on the nature of Israelite law which Samson, in his initial three refusals, adheres to in an assertion of personal and national dignity. The debate in this interval therefore reprises the issues which have governed Samson's life, for it seeks to clarify the difference between freedom and license as well as between discipline and constraint. From a typological perspective, the motions of grace which reverse Samson's intentions seem to prefigure the abrogation of the law by the gospel, but this reading simplifies the relation between law and gospel in a way which the poem itself does not. Prior to the reversal, Samson reflects:

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[6] The Argument which precedes the text states ". . . he at first refuses, dismissing the public Officer with absolute denial to come; at length persuaded inwardly that this was from God, he yields to go along with him. . . . " This information is important, even though it is technically extraneous to the text of the poem.

> Commands are no constraints. If I obey them,
> I do it freely; venturing to displease
> God for the fear of Man, and Man prefer,
> Set God behind: which in his jealousy
> Shall never, unrepented, find forgiveness.
> Yet that he may dispense with me or thee
> Present in Temples at Idolatrous Rites
> For some important cause, thou needst not doubt. (1372-1379)

Afterwards he declares:

> Happ'n what may, of me expect to hear
> Nothing dishonorable, impulse, unworthy
> Our God, our Law, my Nation, or myself;
> The last of me or no I cannot warrant. (1423-1426)

The emerging identification of freedom and discipline in departure from license and constraint, which is central to Milton's conception of the gospel, is portrayed in the reversal, for law is an indispensable aspect of the human dignity Milton's theodicy asserts. Moreover, the progress from silence to speech, which was once the progress of Samson's downfall when he gave up the secret of his strength, here reprises the progress from psalmic prayer as an interior quest for guidance to prophetic utterance as a publically directed statement:

> If there be aught of presage in the mind,
> This day will be remarkable in my life
> By some great act, or of my days the last. (1387-1389)

Samson's cautious qualifications preserve the future as unknown, and the unknown is a basic criterion of St. Paul's concept of "provisional" faith defined in Hebrews XI.

The three refusals to attend the festival which precede the reversal are numerically significant. They establish a symmetry with Samson's three rejections of

Dalila's entreaties prior to his downfall. In this respect the structure of the reversal symbolically undoes the damage of his downfall by seeking to affirm rather than negate his relationship with God. Three is also the number of the middle episodes in the drama which suggests that the reversal provides another compressed illustration or "temporal microcosm" of the structure of the entire poem. As Dr. Johnson points out, nothing in the middle episodes hastens or delays the catastrophe. By the same token, nothing in the three refusals anticipates or causes the final consent for, like the structure of the entire poem, Samson's final consent breaks with the past and turns to the future. This reading would perhaps not satisfy Dr. Johnson or Aristotle, but it demonstrates the way in which Milton's biblical conception of time reappraises and transforms the conventions of the classical genre. The relationship between the refusals and the consent, the no and the yes, especially as it unfolds the relationship between law and gospel, introduces a logic of hope which defeats a logic of despair. Moreover, it is in the nature of Providence as Milton conceives it to effect breaks and ruptures in time. The exaltation of the Son in Paradise Lost illustrates a process of creative change and advent. As Achsah Guibbory puts it: "'This day' and 'now' emphasize newness, the break with the past, and God's announcement that all 'shall bow' similarly divides future behavior from the pattern set in the past" (181). Once the Fall has taken place, God continually separates individuals from the paradigm of their own fallenness, which is perhaps why Milton, in following St. Paul's example in Hebrews XI, emphasizes the disorientation and dislocation of Abraham when he is chosen as the patriarch of Israel:

> he straight obeys,
> Not knowing to what Land, yet firm believes:
> I see him, but thou canst not, with what Faith
> He leaves his Gods, his Friends, and native Soil. (XII:126-129)

Finally, and in the same way, St. Augustine, in incorporating Philippians 3:13-14 into his epiphanic expression of the nature of time in Confessions XI:28, makes rupture, separation and division, and the continual and destructive breaking of the future and the past, paradoxically integral to the recreative synthesis of past and future in a providential framework.

Samson's change of mind means that he must separate himself from his Hebrew companions and join the Philistines. This is a significant moment in the structure of the drama, but patterns of joining and separation, union and division are a significant motif in the episodes which precede the reversal. As a Nazarite Samson is "a person separate to God" (31). In recounting one of his assaults on the Philistines, Samson ponders the possibilities by linking "that day" to "this" or a vanished past to an imagined, hypothetical and unactualized present:

> Had *Judah* that day join'd, or one whole Tribe,
> They had by this possess'd the Towers of *Gath*,
> And lorded over them whom now they serve. (265-267)

Harapha later comments on this same event by calling Samson a "League-breaker" (1184). Finally, Samson's "marriage choice" involves union and division, for while marriage itself is a union Samson chooses to marry outside of his own nation. In each of these cases, as with the reversal, the pattern of union and division reflects Samson's attempts to work out his unique relationship with God.

At the level of language rather than events (though language is action in this poem) we find that Samson's prophetic determination to attend the festival constitutes a divided statement:

> If there be aught of presage in the mind
> This day will be remarkable in my life
> By some great act, or of my days the last. (1387-1389)

According to Daniel Lochman, this passage, with its either/ or reasoning, portrays the inadequacies of a dualistic logic which prophecy moves beyond (196). This is a valid view of prophecy, and as William Kerrigan observes:

> . . . the mode of prophetic knowledge is unique. A prophet does not reason within the sequential movement of history, deriving effect from cause, conclusion from premise. . . . Prophets neither deduce nor

> conclude -- in essence they merely know. Locked inside the succession of moments, men understand events with the logic of action and reaction. The prophet, standing outside of history, understands connections between discrete events that cannot be expressed in the mortal formulas of scientific and historical causation. (219)

While Samson attains a prophetic stature at the point of reversal, his prophecy is received as instinct more than as speech. He does not have the luxury of "standing outside of history." His drama is of the prison house rather than the pinnacle; he is tangled "in the fold of dire necessity" and not transfigured, and the tensions and restrictions of his condition are reflected in his prophetic statement. Focusing on the "temporal semantics" as well as the syntax of the above-quoted passage adds a new dimension to prophetic function. This approach presents us with two distinct phrases which are part of a single statement divided by the conjunction "or":

> This *day* will be remarkable in my life
> or
> of my *days* the last (italics mine)

"Day" is singular; "days" is plural. "Day" is to "days" as eternity is to time, for eternity is singular and unified and time is plural and discordant. "This day" echoes the occasion of the Son's exaltation in Paradise Lost, based upon Psalm 2:7, and therefore carries the sense of a divine decree. "My days," with its possessive pronoun, indicates a time of distraction and exile exclusive of God. The "or" which divides the two phrases mirrors a temporal experience which alternates between union with and separation from God.

Our perception of the interplay between time and eternity in this brief speech of Samson's must also describe their interplay in the drama as a whole. Put another way, Milton's plot, which designates the middle episodes as distractions which are superseded and even forgotten at the moment of reversal, must be comprehended, limited, or, to use Milton's own term, "circumscribed" by an "eternal" dimension which somehow manifests itself in the structure of the drama. The Augustinian patterns in the drama, particularly those illustrated by the climax of the eleventh chapter of the

Confessions, elucidate this structure. Further attention should be given, however, to the role our own foreknowledge of the events of Samson's life play in our perception of the structure Milton creates.

Edward Tayler's theory of "proleptic form" is a significant articulation of the interplay of time and eternity in the structure of Samson Agonistes: "Shakespeare's (and Milton's) drama, unlike the detective story or the usual Broadway play, relies not only upon plot, suspense, but also upon proleptic form, upon the anticipation of a known fulfilment" (109). The ironies which result from our knowledge of the outcome of Samson's story are as abundant as they are in Sophocles rendition of the Oedipus legend, Milton's treatment of these ironies differs from Sophocles' because his view of time, and the nature of events which unfold in it, is determined by a conception of providential action which is foreign to Sophocles (Tayler 109-110). The difference consists, Tayler argues, in the priority given to the future in the structure of Samson Agonistes:

> . . . the main thrust of the play is not from past to present but rather toward the future, toward the "Divine Prediction" that Samson "Should *Israel* from *Philistian* yoke deliver" (39). Where Sophocles in *Oedipus* emphasizes the way the past converges on the present, Milton, his ear attuned to the tick of Eternity, brings the past to bear on the present so that both may be made to converge on the future, the moment of *kairos* when prophecies are fulfilled: the Biblical fullness of time, when time in travail gives birth to Eternity. (110)

In this view of the structure of the poem, proleptic form is to eternity as plot is to time: the outcome of the action is apparent in the first line of the poem, especially since the first line, though ambiguous, evokes psalmic prayer which implies the reunion of Samson and God. Milton, Tayler observes, "contrives to have the entire tragedy implicit in its opening line" (110), yet the outcome of the drama must still unfold and be worked out in the element of time. Plot consists of a beginning, a middle and an end, yet if the end is implied in the beginning and the beginning contained in the end they can only be linked in the act of reading. Tayler's theory of proleptic form is consistent with what I have earlier called Milton's technique of adumbration. The invocation to Paradise Lost is another great example of it, and so is Raphael's account of the War in Heaven with its apocalyptic and eschatological portents. One could say that Raphael's narrative requires the distribution of proleptic form into narrative, and that this requirement is one of the consequences of Raphael's descent from eternity.

Certain conclusions can now be reached concerning Aristotle's idea of plot and Augustine's idea of time as they converge in Samson Agonistes. Plot, as Ricoeur views it, is a poetic solution to the discordance of lived time as Augustine presents it. Part of what Samson Agonistes is concerned with, however, is the failure of human plans or designs which do not coincide with God's will (even as most secular tragedy hinges on the failure of human figures to control the plans they set in motion). Throughout the drama, Samson, Manoa and the Chorus seek to understand the events of Samson's' life, the reasons for his failure, and even the possibility that he may yet succeed. This search for understanding is a central dimension of each episode, and can be illustrated usefully by Ricoeur's distinction between the "episodic" and "configurational" dimensions of narrative:

> . . . every narrative combines two dimensions in various proportions, one chronological and the other nonchronological. The first may be called the episodic dimension, which characterizes the story as made out of events. The second is the configurational dimension, according to which the plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events. ("Narrative Time" 178)
>
> . . . the episodic dimension of a narrative draws narrative time in the direction of the linear representation of time. . . . the configurational arrangement transforms the succession of events into one meaningful whole which is the correlate of the act of assembling the events together and which makes the story followable. Thanks to this reflective act, the entire plot can be translated into one 'thought," which is nothing other than its "point" or "theme." (Time and Narrative 1: 67)

Like Tayler and Kermode, Ricoeur notes the importance of the ending in grasping the plot as a whole: "The plot's configuration also superimposes 'the sense of an ending' -- to use Kermode's expression -- on the open-endedness of mere succession. . . . Then following the story is less important than apprehending the well known end as implied in the beginning and the well-known episodes as leading to this end" ("Narrative Time" 179). As readers, we know and anticipate the ending of Samson Agonistes, yet the poem has been criticized because its episodes do not "lead" to this ending. Milton considers the very human motive of grasping events as an intelligible whole within the drama because he is portraying a power which is greater than our understanding or eloquence.

In its traditional function of picking up and developing the themes and events of a particular episode, the Chorus becomes the vehicle of the configurational dimension of the poem, for they take each episode as a transient end-point and try to elicit some moral and spiritual value from it. Invariably they endorse a restrictive and submissive posture which, while it extols the value of patience, does so because it sees providence as ostensibly fickle, inscrutable, and "contrarious." Their harsh application of the law to women (1053-1060) is also a sanctimonious attempt to neutralize the "confusion," or perhaps the threat, that relationships may present.. While the Chorus is pious, helpful, and not without insight, it is only in the fifth act, in which they read events in light of their final ending, in the speeches of the Semichorus, that they step beyond the security of previous interpretations and assumptions.

The speeches of the Semichorus respond to the Messenger's report of Samson's death. Borrowing terms from Ricoeur's theory of plot, we might say that whereas the Messenger's narrative provides the final clarification of the episodic dimension of Milton's poem, the Semichorus provides a final clarification of its configurational dimension. While the Messenger is a conventional figure in Greek tragedy, the term "Messenger" evokes the prophetic function which the Messenger himself senses in his own situation. Indeed, his entire role compresses and reviews the central issues in Samson's life. Firstly, as he approaches Manoa, he considers that he may have been "elected" by providence to witness Samson's death, which leads him to consider equally, and unresolvably, the place of his own free will in the course of events:

> But providence or instinct of nature seems,
> Or reason though disturb'd, and scarce consulted,
> To have guided me aright, I know not how,
> To thee first, reverend *Manoa*. (1545-1548)

He then engages in the task of reconstructing or refiguring the day's events in chronological (or episodic) order. "Occasions drew me early to this City" he reports. Like Donne in "Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward," he is moved by "pleasure or business," or perhaps Milton was thinking of Simon of Cyrene, a man compelled to carry the cross who, as Mark describes him, "was coming in from the country" (15:21). As he undertakes his detailed account of the spectacle, the perturbed reason, the speechlessness and the uncertainty which he demonstrates when he first appears are replaced by a composure which parallels the same change in Samson. The Messenger's first line, "O wither shall I run, or which way fly," refers to Psalm 139, verse 7, and this reference, since it culminates at the end of his narrative in his composed quotation of Samson's final speech, in which Samson seems literally to speak through him, offers an analogy of the movement from psalmic orientation to prophetic assertion which mirrors Samson's own progress at the spectacle.

The Messenger's report reinforces the nature of the poem as a "closet" drama, for in following the classical convention of describing spectacles which are not to be displayed, Milton builds the theatre within the listener's mind:

> The building was a spacious Theatre
> Half round on two main Pillars vaulted high,
> With seats where all the Lords and each degree
> Of sort, might sit in order to behold,
> The other side was op'n, where the throng
> On banks and scaffolds under Sky might stand;
> I among these aloof obscurely stood. (1605-1611)

The Messenger's account of Samson's performance at the spectacle reflects, in its brevity and compression, the episodic dimension of Milton's Plot:

> He patient but undaunted where they led him
> Came to the place, and what was set before him
> Which without help of eye might be assay'd,
> To heave, pull, draw, or break, he still perform'd
> All with incredible, stupendious force
> None daring to appear Antagonist. (1623-1628)

The feats Samson performs before destroying the Temple -- the heaving, the pulling, the drawing, the breaking -- mirror the middle episodes of the drama which in turn mirror the exploits which make up Samson's life. They are spectacular, impressive distractions which are disjoined from the moment of composure when his status as a witness is restored.

It is significant, therefore, that the Semichorus, in eliciting configuration or "thought" out of the Messenger's clarification of episode, provides three metaphors for Samson's "inward" illumination -- the Dragon, the Eagle and the Phoenix -- for three is the number of the middle episodes. The final metaphor of the Phoenix is the most sustained and elaborate in the passage:

> So virtue giv'n for lost,
> Depress, and overthrown, as seem'd,
> Like that self-begott'n bird
> That no second knows nor third,
> And lay erewhile a Holocaust,
> From out her ashy womb now teem'd,
> Revives, reflourishes, then vigorous most
> When most unactive deem'd,
> And though her body die, her fame survives,
> A secular bird ages of lives. (1697-1707)

The beginning and the ending of Samson Agonistes are joined here as moments of meaningful and mutual illumination as this image of rebirth summons the image of Samson's first birth which was

> from Heaven foretold
> Twice by an Angel, who at last in sight
> Of both my Parents all in flames ascended
> From off the altar. (23-26)

Between these two moments stretches the realm of memory which, as the Psalms show us, is both the dark void in which we hear the voices of recrimination, regret and anxiety, and the dark firmament in which the lights of our own potential are reignited.

Finally, the repetition of stories, whereby they are established in memory, is an important basis of the configurational dimension of plot, which is the dimension of our understanding and comprehension. As Mink suggests, repetition strengthens "the act of understanding in which action and events, although represented as occurring in the order of time, can be surveyed as occurring, as it were, in a single glance as bound together in an order of significance, a representation of the *totum simul* which we can never more than partially achieve" (554). This statement implies both the power and the limits of poetry. In Paradise Lost especially, Milton is deeply impressive in his ability almost to resist the discursive movement of language and capture events in their eternal patterns of signification. At other times, and perhaps just as often, he carefully and sensitively acquiesces to the limits of language. Both features are equally important parts of the relationship betwen time and eternity in Milton's poetry. The *totum simul* to which Mink compares our grasp of events in the form of judgment and comprehension can never be more than an approximation. This ideal of configuration could only be realized in the mind of God, and, in the case of Milton, the analogy easily reminds us of the human usurpation of divine knowledge and authority as an aspect of the Fall which weakened our understanding. The poetry must therefore observe the means and the methods God ordains for our participation in his understanding. The major poems close with this emphasis.

After Adam has witnessed and heard Michael's prophetic narrative which measures "this transient World, the Race of time,/ Till time stand fixt" (XII:554-55), he shares his understanding with the angel:

> Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best
> And love with fear the only God, to walk
> As in his presence, ever to observe

> His providence, and on him sole depend,
> Merciful over all his works, with good
> Still overcoming evil, and by small
> Accomplishing great things, by things deem'd weak
> Subverting worldy strong, and worldy wise
> By simply meek; that suffering for truth's sake
> Is fortitude to highest victory,
> And to the faithful Death the Gate of Life;
> Taught this by example whom I now
> Acknowledge my Redeemer ever blest. (XII: 561-573)

Michael suplements Adam's understanding by saying: "This having learnt, thou hast attain'd the sum / Of wisdom; hope no higher." (575-576).

Concurrent with the vision of history is Eve's dream of her descendent, the "great deliverance by her Seed to come" (XII: 600). The vision of history witnessed by Adam and the dream of deliverance witnessed by Eve represent the *totum simul* of God's knowledge because they are simultaneous, and illustrate providence working in two different places at the same time. When Adam returns to Eve, Eve exclaims: Whence thou return'st, and whither went'st, I know;/ For God is also in sleep" (610-611). The lines certainly recall Psalm 139, especially verse 2: "Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off." The Psalm is, of course, addressed to God, but the allusion signals the extent to which Adam and Eve participate in divine knowledge through grace. Moreover, since Psalm 139 contemplates the synthesis or joining together of the body in the womb, it both anticipates the Incarnation and portends the restoration of the divine image in humanity at the end of history. Augustine's comments on this psalm illustrate its temporal patterns: "For the Psalms were sung long before the Lord was born of Mary, yet not before he was Lord; for from everlasting he was the creator of all things, but in time he was born of his creature" (Expositions 635).

The end of Paradise Lost anticipates the verbal joining through sharing of what Adam and Eve have witnessed, respectively and simultaneously, as a vision or a dream of history. As Michael instructs Adam: "thou at season fit / Let her with thee partake what thou hast heard" (587-598). So too, in Augustine's Confessions, the interaction of the eternal with the temporal is portrayed as a joining of voices in temporal succession. The copious psalm quotations which are woven through the text connect the voice of a creature given to outward distraction and disorientation to a voice which is inwardly formed and composed by providential guidance.

The view of history gained by the characters in Samson Agonistes is fragmented rather than synthetic, is severely limited, and is deferred in a typological pattern which they cannot grasp. But the psalm references which link their voices anticipate the way in which the Psalms, along with other biblical texts, will remember the events of their history and look beyond them, even as Milton's poem does. Perhaps this is another reason why the Messenger is introduced with a clear reference to Psalm 139. His first line, "O wither shall I run, or which way fly," while conveying the trauma of the catastrophe, certainly echoes verse 7 of Psalm 139, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" The absence of the "thou" reference, emphatic in the Psalm but suppressed in the Messenger's line, suggests the "hidden" action of providence. In addition, as this witness begins his initially distracted but eventually more composed narration of what, "first or last was done," we recognize that the prophetic joining of past and future, of first and last, or even the eternal present of a providential configuration, can only be partially approximated as experience shared in the joining of verbal testimonies. The Messenger's role does not so much defer to Aristotle's prohibition of on-stage spectacle as demonstrate that the witness of action must be succeeded, and remembered, by the witness of words.

The distinction made in this last observation is perhaps an illustration of the nature of the tragedy in Samson Agonistes. The distinction between actions and words involves the separation of Samson from the community. While action is isolating, even when the individual is "separate unto God," remembrance is the basis of community, and it is founded on words. Samson the man may be tragic, given all that he neither knows nor shares in the medium of human community. Samson the servant, on the other hand, may finally know something of his value to God. Human dignity is as important a parameter of tragedy as human isolation, and if Christian tragedy is possible, it will revalue dignity in terms of the covenant between God and humanity. Samson's action may be transient, limited, and incomplete as an act of deliverance. Indeed, it leaves the human community on the same plane of history where the same patterns will be repeated. Yet if Samson Agonistes warns us of anything, it is that idols, in whatever form they appear, cannot contain the power of the human image recollected by divine concern.

CONCLUSION

The epochs of history outlined in Augustine's City of God and expressed as prophecy in the final two books of Paradise Lost are divided, not primarily by dates or even by events, but by the advents of particular individuals. The reason for this is clear. If the six days of creation in Genesis is Augustine's metaphor for the six ages of human history, then, by analogy, the *telos* of both the six day's work and history is the making, and remaking, of the human image. The advent of particular individuals at the end and beginning of each era prefigures the end of history itself.

Samson is not one of these pivotal figures in history. Nevertheless, the structure of the Judges narrative invites comparison with history as it is outlined by Augustine and interpreted by Milton. Not all of the judges fit the role of the "one just man" which Milton emphasizes in his version of Augustine's pattern. Most, like Samson, fall far short of this ideal. Yet God is the subject and the Judges are part of a predicate, for we read again and again that "God raised up judges," or created individuals, in response to human need at the nadir of periods of apostasy and disaffection and cynicism. Patterns of error are repeated, but God's action symbolically reaffirms the covenant implied in the making of the first human being.

Our act of reading follows events in the lives of Abraham or Noah in Genesis, or of Gideon or Samson in Judges, or others. But the primary fact of God acting in the appearance of these figures is crucial to understanding the *mimesis* which is Samson Agonistes. Samson loses sight of this fact and this is his tragic blindness. When he supplants God as the author of his actions, the events of his life become transient distractions and his retrospective narration of them becomes suspect, not as a more or less accurate account of what happened, but as a legitimate basis for a covenantal relationship. Silence is to speech as patience is to action; these are the parameters which maintain in perspective the covenant between Samson and God.

The final act of Samson Agonistes, the only act in which Samson is not present, concerns the recovery of perspective. Yet the re-reading of Samson's life, by Milton's characters or by us, is still a problematic task. The Messenger enters the city in the morning for what may have been mundane reasons, and finds his steps redirected by "providence" or "instinct" or "reason though disturb'd" (1545-1546). The response of the Semichorus to the Messenger's narrative seems inspired, yet we sense that there is already something mundane in Manoa's predictions of the cultic festivals the memory of Samson will inspire. The tension between the legend and the man succeeds the psychic tensions which, for Samson at least, were resolved by the "rouzing motions" of grace. The interpreters who gather in the fifth act are in the middle of history and not at its end, and the tensions which condition fallen history subtly reassert themselves.

The thematization of reading and interpretation in the fifth act serves perhaps to caution critics who, for example, compromise Milton's *mimesis* of a providential action by asking it to conform to the logic of a classical "middle" rather than gauging its deviation from this ideal. Perhaps the Bible is Milton's preeminent model for readings and interpretations as well as for literary themes, models and narratives. The Epistles of Saint Paul, apart from their other prominent motives, offer sustained readings of the Old Testament in light of the Incarnation of Christ. The prominence of the word "promise" in Samson Agonistes asks us to consider the relationship between the poem and the Epistle to the Hebrews in which promise is a central theme.

In describing the advent of Christ as a new covenant, the author of Hebrews cites a number of Old Testament figures as expressions or "heirs" of a unified ideal he calls "promise." In Hebrews XI, where Samson is listed among these heirs, the author follows a chronology of figures whose actions in response to promise express the ideal of "provisional" faith. With respect to Samson Agonistes and the debates over its middle episodes and the significance of its final act, we might think of Hebrews XI as demonstrating the act of eliciting or grasping a configuration from a sequence of episodes. While what is finally elicited is an explicitly moral exhortation to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (XII:1), provisional faith and patience are established, as they are in Samson Agonistes and throughout Milton's writings, as the qualities of a mind conditioned by the phenomenon of providential time.

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